THE COMPLETE GREEK DRAMA



All the Extant Tragedies of
Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides,
and the Comedies of
Aristophanes and Menander

RANDOM HOUSE

THE
Complete Greek Drama

ALL THE EXTANT TRAGEDIES OF AESCHYLUS, SOPHOCLES AND EURIPIDES, AND THE COMEDIES OF ARISTOPHANES AND MENANDER, IN A VARIETY OF TRANSLATIONS

EDITED BY

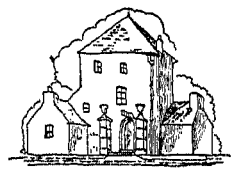
WHITNEY J. OATES

AND

EUGENE O'NEILL, JR.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME ONE



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To Mrs. Harry Fine for Paul Elmer More's translation of *Prometheus Bound*.

To L. A. Post for his introductions and translations of *The Girl from Samos, The Arbitration* and *The Shearing of Glycera*.

PREFACE

THE aim of the present publication is to give English readers in a single book the complete corpus of the extant Greek drama. The plays themselves have been in the past available only in individual translations, or in translations of single dramatists, or in translations of a few plays selected from the total number that has survived. The editors have endeavoured to choose the best available translation for each individual play. In some instances they were faced with an embarrassment of riches, while in others they were constrained to include a version with which they were somewhat dissatisfied, yet which clearly seemed to be superior to the other renderings at their disposal. The main criteria for determining the value of a particular version were these: essential correspondence to the Greek original considered as a whole, plus as close fidelity as possible to the original in specific detail. Whether the version was in prose or verse was not made a primary consideration in the process of selection, but careful observance of the main criteria resulted in collecting a group of translations, thirty of which are in prose, fifteen in verse, and two in a combination of prose and verse. The variety of translations should enable the reader to obtain a better conception of the originals than would be possible if all the versions were from a single hand, however dexterous.

Every effort has been made to impress upon the reader the extreme importance of the musical element in the Greek plays. To accomplish this end, all choral or singing passages in the prose versions have been indented, and broken up into their various choric constituents. Likewise, speeches which are attributed to the Chorus in the manuscripts, if they are written in the regular metre of the dialogue passages, have been assigned to the Leader of the Chorus, who thus becomes almost another member of the cast. Furthermore, all passages which were sung or chanted, so far as can be determined by their metre in the original, have been so indicated in the present text.

As much uniformity as was possible has been imposed upon the texts. Certain inconsistencies remain, but they are for the most part attributable to the idiosyncrasies of the particular translator. Complete uniformity has hence been not only impossible to achieve, but also undesir-

able, since certain translations would have been impaired in the effort to bring about greater consistency. Many of the versions were almost completely lacking in stage directions. An attempt has been made to supply that deficiency, but no stage direction has been added which cannot reasonably be inferred from the text itself, since there are practically no such directions in the Greek manuscripts of the plays.

No verse translations have been altered in any particular by the editors. The anonymous prose version of Aristophanes has been exhaustively corrected and revised, while certain minor modifications have been introduced into the translations of Euripides by E. P. Coleridge. The remaining prose versions appear as they were originally published.

The General Introduction attempts to present certain material, both historical and systematic, which is requisite to the understanding of the plays. It treats, for example, such subjects as the nature of the Greek theatre, Greek Tragedy and Greek Comedy in general, and the lives and works of the individual dramatists. Accompanying each play is a short special introduction to that play, designed primarily to facilitate its understanding on the part of the reader. Each play also is accompanied by notes which endeavour to explain particular passages which otherwise might prove difficult to apprehend. A Glossary, mainly of proper names, appears at the end of Volume II, which renders unnecessary a number of specific notes on the individual plays. It is hoped that the Glossary will prove a useful and valuable adjunct to the book, being particularly important for the plays of Aristophanes with their wealth of topical allusions.

The editors wish to thank Professors D. R. Stuart, G. E. Duckworth, F. R. B. Godolphin, N. H. Pearson, H. C. Hutchins, and Dr. N. T. Pratt for invaluable assistance in the preparation of this book. They are particularly grateful to Professor L. A. Post for permission to use his introductions and revised translation of the comedies of Menander. They wish also to express their appreciation to Mrs. Thomas S. Dignan for assistance in connection with the frontispiece for Volume I, and to Professor Margarete Bieber for permission to use one of her photographs as the frontispiece to Volume II.

The editors together assume the responsibility for the selection of translations. Mr. Oates edited the text, prepared the individual introductions and notes for the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. He also prepared that part of the General Introduction which deals with tragedy and the tragedians. Mr. O'Neill edited the text, revised the translation, and prepared the individual introductions and notes for the plays of Aristophanes, as well as that portion of the General Introduction which deals with comedy and the comic poets. He likewise compiled the Glossary.

The editors also desire to express their thanks to Random House for their courteous cooperation, and for their willingness to undertake this publication which, it is earnestly hoped, will further the understanding and appreciation of these masterpieces of Greek creative art.

Whitney J. Oates
Eugene O'Neill, Jr.

May 6, 1938

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I. Tragedy

ALL the extant plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were written during the fifth century B.C. Behind them lies a rich literary and dramatic, or at least quasi-dramatic tradition, which accounts in no small measure for the depth, scope and complexity of the art form which the plays embody. The problem of apprehending and fully understanding the dramas is therefore not a simple one, since they cannot be divorced completely from the epic, lyric, and dramatic tradition which precedes them. By far the most important factor in the tradition is the epic which we know chiefly through the great Homeric masterpieces, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These poems present a most comprehensive view of human life, marked by an astonishing sophistication, coupled with a most refreshing naïveté. These two attributes are so blended in the Homeric epics that they possess a distinctive and unique flavour as well as a real depth of perception, a combination which is not to be found elsewhere in literature.

In the interval between the epics of Homer, which scholars date variously from the tenth to the eighth century B.C., and the age of the three great tragic poets, many advances were made by the peoples who inhabited the Balkan peninsula, the shores of the Aegean Sea and its islands. It is in this epoch that Western philosophical speculation commenced, when thinkers began to explore the various phenomena of the external world, and came to understand many aspects of nature which had hitherto been shrouded in complete mystery. The creative literary activity of this epoch likewise betokens on the part of the Greeks an increasingly higher level of self-understanding and self-consciousness, in the best sense of the word. At this time appeared a group of lyric poets, who were capable of brilliant self-expression. Such writers as Sappho, Alcaeus, and Simonides had looked deeply within their own natures, and through the vehicle of their poetry made abundantly evident how thoroughly they understood the essential character of man's inner being.

Not only did the creators of Greek drama in the fifth century draw

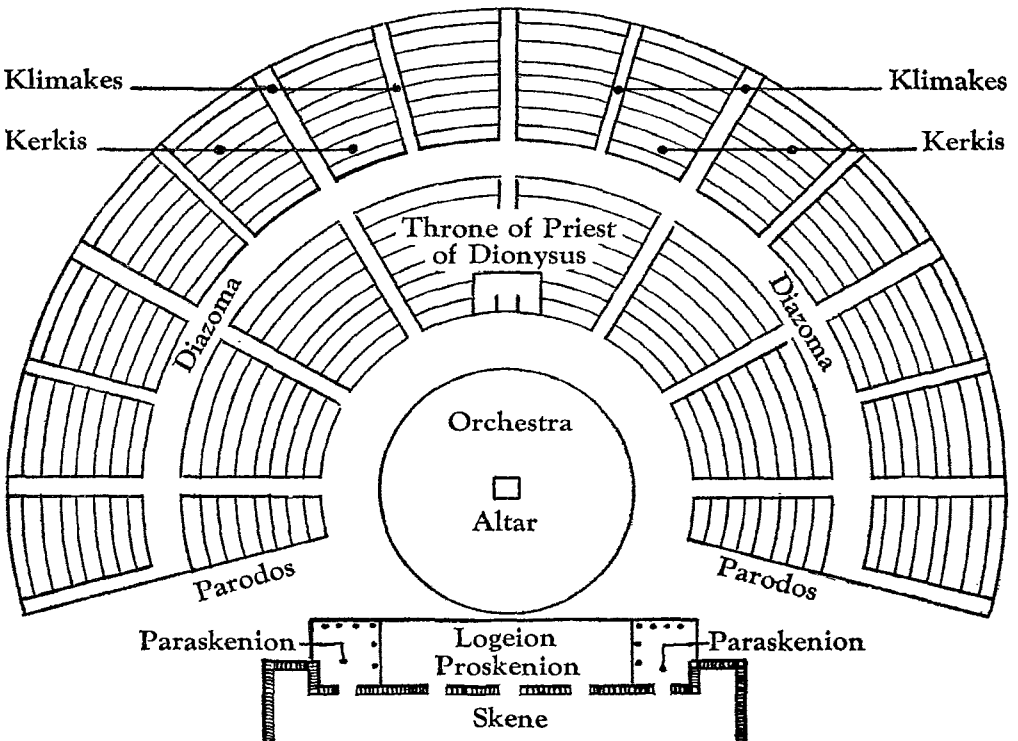
upon this rich literary tradition which was their heritage, but it must also be remembered that the audiences for which these dramatists wrote shared deeply in the inheritance. For the Athenian of the fifth century B.C., poetry was not alone something which would give him insights into life, but it was likewise an integral and meaningful part of his life. In the absence of libraries and books "published" in large numbers, the individual came in contact with "literature," that is, almost exclusively poetry, through oral presentations of the epic, lyric or dramatic forms. He spent long hours hearing this poetry and as a result it became part of his nature. The audiences which witnessed the great tragedies must have been made up of individuals who were thus steeped in poetry, for on no other theory can we explain how plays, replete with choral odes of intricate metrical structure and brilliant imagery, could have been so widely popular.

Most introductions to the reading of Greek tragedy begin with an account of the origins of the form. For the purposes of the general reader, it seems far better to postpone a consideration of this subject until somewhat later, and at the outset rather to stress the fact that in Greek tragedy as we now have it we meet a fully developed dramatic form, which was presented to an audience possessed of a high degree of sophistication, again in the best and purest sense of the word. In the first place, it is absolutely necessary for anyone who desires to apprehend as completely as possible these Greek plays, to re-create them imaginatively as dramas, that is, as actual plays, produced dramatically before an audience. Such an apprehension or understanding can be facilitated, first, by a description of the theatre in which these plays were acted, plus an analysis, external in character, of the actual form of the plays, with particular emphasis upon those features of the Greek plays that differentiate them from dramatic productions with which we are familiar on our own contemporary stage. Having approached the dramas from an external point of view, we shall then be able better to analyze them from the internal point of view, in the effort to determine what is their essential nature, what meaning or meanings they possess as works of art.

A spectator of a Greek dramatic performance in the latter half of the fifth century B.C. would find himself seated in the *theatron,* or *koilon,*

NOTE. The diagram opposite, which was prepared by Professor A. M. Friend, of the Department of Art and Archaeology in Princeton University, does not reproduce any particular ancient theatre. It is, hence, a kind of "ideal" diagram, which should make clear the relationships which the several elements of the theatre bear to each other. It combines in it material drawn primarily from the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens, and from the famous theatre at Epidaurus. In studying the diagram, reference should be made to the frontispieces of Volume I and Volume II of this book.

THEATRON OR KOILON



a semi-circular, curved bank of seats, resembling in some respects the closed end of a horseshoe stadium. He has climbed up the steps (*klimakes*) to reach his seat, which is in a section (*kerkis*). Probably he has in the process walked along the level aisle (*diazoma*) which divides the lower and the upper parts of the *theatron*. Below him, in the best location in the theatre, is the throne of the priest of Dionysus,[1] who presides in a sense over the whole performance, which, as we shall see later, is essentially religious in character. The *theatron* is large—in fact, the one in Athens, in the Theatre of Dionysus, with its seats banked up on the south slope of the Acropolis, seated approximately 17,000 persons.

The spectator sees before him a level circular area called the *orchestra*, which means literally the "dancing place" (deriving from the Greek verb, ὀρχεῖσθαι, to dance). In the centre of the *orchestra* stands an altar, which figures frequently as a stage-property in a number of the plays. A part of the dramatic action will take place in the *orchestra*, as well as the manoeuvres and dance figures performed by the Chorus as they present their odes. To the right and left of the *theatron* are the *paradoi*, which are used not only by the spectators for entering and leaving the theatre, but also for the entrances and exits of actors and the Chorus.

Directly beyond the circular *orchestra* lies the *skene* or scene building.[2] At first, and probably during the balance of the fifth century B.C. the *skene* was a wooden structure, which later gave way to a permanent stone building, after its form became sufficiently stabilized. In most plays the *skene* represents the façade of a house, a palace, or a temple. Various devices [3] were developed from time to time which made it possible to denote to the audience the nature of the building or general background which the *skene* was supposed to represent. By the use of these devices likewise changes of scene could be effected in the relatively few instances in the plays which demand such treatment. The *skene* normally had three doors which served as additional entrances and exits for the actors. Immediately in front of the scene-building was a level platform, in the fifth century B.C. in all probability only a single step above the level of the *orchestra*. This was called the *proskenion* or

[1] Cf. Aristophanes, *The Frogs*, line 294, where the poet has his character, Dionysus, rush over to address the priest.

[2] In some of the earliest plays this was probably not used at all. Cf. the frontispiece to Volume I.

[3] The exact nature of these devices is very difficult to determine. They may have been painted panels, which were movable. In the later theatres there were *periakti*, or revolving prisms, set in the wall of the *skene*. Each of the three sides of the *periaktus* was painted differently. By turning them about, a change of scene could easily be indicated.

logeion where much of the dramatic action of the plays takes place, though of course in many instances the actors descended into the *orchestra,* and on occasions appeared upon the roof of the *skene.* Flanking the *proskenion* were two projecting wings, the so-called *paraskenia.* It must be remembered that the *skene,* since at first it was only a wooden structure, was flexible in its form, and was probably modified frequently.

Dramatic productions of the fifth century B.C. involved the use of two mechanical devices, with which the student of Greek drama should be familiar. In the first place, the open-air theatre with its background of the *skene,* imposed a strict limitation upon the playwright in his choice of the scenes which he wished to present on the stage in his drama. They had to be only those which reasonably and convincingly could take place out of doors, normally in front of the house, palace, or temple, as the case might be. Interior scenes therefore were practically impossible to present. Hence, to overcome this difficulty, a mechanical device, called the *eccyclema,* was developed in the fifth century. It was some kind of platform on wheels, which, so far as we can discover, was rolled out from the *skene,* and in this position was supposed to represent an interior scene.[4] Euripides and Aristophanes seem to have used the *eccyclema* more frequently than the other dramatists whose plays we possess.

The other mechanical device which often appears in the dramas is the μηχανή or "machine." Frequently at the close of a play the dramatist introduced a god into the action, who would naturally be expected to appear from above. He apparently was brought in by some kind of a crane or derrick, called the "machine." Inasmuch as the god who was thus introduced usually served to disentangle the complicated threads of the dramatic action, and on occasions seemed to be brought in quite gratuitously by a playwright unable to work out a dénouement from elements already in the situation, the term *deus ex machina,* "the god from the machine," has become standard in dramatic criticism. It possesses regularly a pejorative connotation, and refers to awkward, mechanical, and unconvincing means which a playwright is forced to employ if he cannot work out a satisfactory resolution to his plot. In the ancient productions, we can reasonably imagine that some violence was done to the audience's sense of realism whenever a god was brought in by the "machine," but we must not forget that scenery and "realism" did not figure so largely in the ancient theatre as they do normally on the present stage. Be it said, however, that the ancients were not unaware

[4] Philologists and archaeologists have not been able to discover exactly what the *eccyclema* was. However, there seems to be no doubt that it was used in the production of plays in the fifth century B.C.

that the "machine" could be embarrassingly awkward, as the famous scene in Aristophanes' *Peace* adequately indicates, when Trygaeus is hoisted aloft, riding on the back of a huge beetle.

In Athens of the fifth century B.C. dramas were presented only on two occasions, both of which marked religious festivals. At other times plays were presented at rural festivals in various Greek communities, when the productions, so to speak, would "go on the road." In the city, the less important of the festivals, called the *Lenaea,* or Festival of the Wine-Press, was held in January/February of each year. In general this occasion was devoted to the presentation of comedies, though some tragedies were also produced. The more important festival, however, was the so-called *Greater* or *City Dionysia,* which was celebrated annually in March/April in honour of the god, Dionysus. Large audiences attended the festival, and witnessed the various performances. The spectators apparently were always in holiday mood, but on the whole maintained good order, though they felt themselves free to express their approval or disapproval by clapping, shouting, hissing, and kicking their heels against the benches. It was not unheard of to throw fruit at bad performers, and there is even a case on record of a poor actor who was almost stoned to death by his dissatisfied public.[5] Earlier in the century admission to the performances was free, but later the cost was two obols, which would be refunded by the State to anyone who could show legitimate need.

Three contests for poets were held in the *Greater Dionysia,* one in comedy, one in tragedy, and one in the dithyramb. Prior to the Peloponnesian War the festival apparently lasted six days. On the first took place the great ceremonial procession which was followed on the second by the competition for the dithyrambic choruses. The dithyramb was an elaborate choral ode sung and performed by a trained chorus of fifty, the song itself having a direct bearing upon the central religious orientation of the whole festival and its connection with the god, Dionysus. Ten dithyrambs were presented in the contest on this day. Five comic poets each submitted a play for the competition in comedy which occupied the third day. Three tragic poets each submitted a tetralogy for the contest in tragedy which filled the last three days of the festival. A tragic poet had to present a group of four plays, three of them tragedies, either on separate themes or all on the same subject, plus a somewhat lighter after-piece known as a satyr-play.[6] During the days of the Peloponnesian War, 431–404 B.C., probably as a war measure, the festival was reduced from six to five days in length, and the number of

[5] On the audience, cf. G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (Boston, 1920) pp. 80–83.

[6] Cf. the introduction to Euripides' *The Cyclops.*

comic competitors was diminished from five to three. During these years, the program for the last three days contained a tragic tetralogy in the morning followed by a comedy in the afternoon.[7]

Great care and expense went into the individual dramatic productions. The poet himself in many instances superintended or directed his own play, or on certain occasions even acted in it. In all probability he helped select his cast, all the parts of which were taken by male actors, coached them and supervised the training of the Chorus. Normally in the tragedies there were not more than three actors for each play, any one of whom might take more than one part if the exigencies of the piece demanded it. A wealthy citizen stood the cost of a play's production, a responsibility which was placed upon him by the State, and was regarded as a legitimate obligation of his position and citizenship.

The tragedies that were thus presented were elaborate and complicated works of art. They combined within them many variegated elements: rhythm in the spoken or recited poetry, vivid action, and brilliant colour. There was also the music which accompanied the choral odes, to our ears at least, strangely melodic, rather than harmonic. The plays included both solo and choral singing, plus a strikingly posed and highly stylized dancing. A further effect was added by the fact that the actors all wore masks. This may have been partially because the audience was so far removed from the actors that it was impossible to achieve any effects through facial expressions. The mask also tended to fix the dominating trait of any character in the minds of the audience, and at the same time to elevate the characters, to make them effectively and significantly unreal, and in some way to raise them above the audience. For much the same reasons the actors wore the *cothurnus,* or the high-soled tragic boot, which increased their stature and added to their impressiveness.

The typical Greek tragedy is divided into certain definite parts. The play opens with a *prologue,* a scene in which a single character may speak, or a dialogue may take place. In some of the plays of Euripides, an opening monologue almost functions as a program with program notes in a modern theatre. In general in this short introductory scene, the poet acquaints the audience with the requisite information concerning the dramatic situation of the play.

After the *prologue* comes the *parodos,* the first appearance of the Chorus. The members of this group enter the *orchestra,* singing and dancing, clearly suiting the rhythm of their motion and their gesticu-

[7] Readers may be referred to J. T. Allen, "On the Program of the City Dionysia during the Peloponnesian War," *University of California Publications in Classical Philology,* XII (1938) pp. 35–42, a number of whose views have here been adopted.

lations to the gravity and import of the words they sing. As time passes in the fifth century the Chorus in tragedy steadily diminishes in importance. At first, it is closely bound up with the play's action, as, for example, in *The Suppliants* of Aeschylus, but in Euripides, particularly in his later plays, the Chorus merely sings lyrical interludes which have little or no coherence with the play. Normally the members of the Chorus serve as interested commentators upon the action, sometimes functioning as a background of public opinion against which the situation of the particular play is projected, or again becoming the vehicle whereby the poet is able to make clearer the more universal significance of the action. The Chorus in Aeschylus and Sophocles, to a greater extent than in Euripides, notably seems to serve this latter function and as such embodies the very essence of their plays.[8] At the conclusion of the *parodos,* the Chorus almost always remains "on the stage," so to speak, throughout the remainder of the play. In the tragedies there are usually fifteen members in the Chorus. One of this number normally acts as a leader who may do solo singing and dancing, or may become virtually another character in the *dramatis personae.* Sometimes the Chorus breaks into two groups which sing responsively.[9]

As soon as the opening choral song has been completed, there comes the first *episode.* This is the exact counterpart of the act or scene in a modern play. Usually it contains a dialogue, but rarely in the Greek tragedies are there more than three participants in it. A *stasimon* or choral ode succeeds the *episode* and the remainder of the piece is made up of these two parts in alternation. A normal play contains four or five of each. On occasion a *commus* takes the place of a *stasimon.* The *commus* is a lyric passage, sung by an actor or actors together with the Chorus. Intricate metres distinguish the *stasimon* and *commus,* whereas the spoken passages of dialogue or monologue in the *episodes* are written in the iambic trimeter, a close equivalent to the iambic pentameter or blank verse in English. After the series of *episodes* and *stasima,* there

[8] This statement does not apply exclusively to all the plays of Euripides. Notable exceptions may be found, for example, in the *Medea* and *The Bacchae.*

[9] It is possible in translation to give only an incomplete impression of the highly complicated rhythmic and metric structure of the choral passages. Suffice it to say that they had a carefully articulated and balanced symmetry of constituent parts, for which there were certain conventions. These conventions were formulated with enough flexibility to allow for great variety of individual treatment. The *strophe* is balanced by the *antistrophe*; the pair is sometimes followed by an *epode.* This basic pattern is varied on occasion by the use of repeated refrains and similar devices. The divisions of the choral passages are indicated insofar as possible in the various translations printed herewith.

is the finale or *exodos*, the closing scene of the play at the end of which the Chorus leaves the view of the audience by way of the *parodoi*.

It can be readily seen that all these several elements in the Greek tragedy are brought together into a dramatic synthesis which in many ways resembles the modern opera, though of course the opera does not have the long sustained passages of spoken dialogue. However, it is most important for the reader of Greek tragedy, if he hopes to apprehend these plays imaginatively, never to forget that rhythmic movement, sound, song, and music are integral to the art form.

The foregoing description of the Greek theatre and the analysis of the form of the Greek tragedies themselves have been primarily external in character. An attempt to analyze these plays from the internal point of view, to discover that which constitutes their inner essence, is by its very nature a far more difficult task. Such an attempt seems to raise a series of questions which must be faced. First, how did Greek tragedy arise? What in its prior history in some measure goes to explain those essential inner characteristics, or qualities which any reader of the plays readily and inevitably recognizes? Second, what did Aristotle, the most influential and in many ways the most important critic of antiquity, think about tragedy and its nature? And third, and most difficult of all, what generically and basically is tragedy?

Perhaps it is best to approach the internal analysis of Greek tragedy from the historical point of view, that is, by looking at its origins, insofar as they may be recovered, to derive certain clues concerning its inner character. The problem of the origin of tragedy has been a subject of endless debate on the part of scholars, and as a result a great number of divergent theories have been advanced. There seems to be evidence for the relatively early existence of the dithyramb, a hymn sung in honour of Dionysus by a chorus dressed at satyrs. Apparently from this early form the dithyramb such as was presented in the fifth century festivals developed. In this later form, the dithyramb did not contain anything of the "satyric" in it. Likewise from the early form emerged the satyr-play such as was produced as the fourth lighter after-piece in the tragic tetralogy. Scholars seem to be in general agreement also that tragedy grew out of this same dithyrambic origin. There is, however, no agreement as to the precise way in which these forms developed.

It seems reasonable to conjecture that all three, tragedy, satyr-play, and later dithyramb, had a common and close association with the spring festivals which were held to celebrate the worship of Dionysus. This god, as one of the Greek anthropomorphic divinities, symbolised the spirit of fertility, of generation and regeneration, which marks the season of spring, and he also came to be identified with the vine. The steps by which the tragedy, as we know it, came into being may have been

somewhat as follows: first, in the early "satyric" dithyramb, the leader of the chorus was separated from his fellows and began during the course of the hymn to carry on quasi-dialogue or conversation with them. The song probably contained a large element of narrative, with a theme bearing on some event connected directly with Dionysus. Next probably came the step of impersonation, when the chorus leader assumed the rôle of some character in the song. It seems reasonable to suppose that this rudimentary dramatic form now became distinct from the dithyramb proper, which carried on an independent existence. In the dramatic form, however, after the step of impersonation had been taken, new themes were probably introduced which were not necessarily connected with Dionysus. After this point we apparently are on firmer ground, as Aristotle tells us that Aeschylus added the second actor, lessened the importance of the Chorus, and that Sophocles in his turn added the third actor.

The theory, as it has been outlined, seems plausible, though of course we must remember that it is highly conjectural. At least we are certain that the three forms, tragedy, satyr-play, and dithyramb, were separate and distinct in the fifth century B.C. Furthermore, it seems very likely that they had a common origin. Exactly how they became separated in all probability may never be known, but it is reasonable to infer that as they began to achieve independent existences they continued to exert influence upon one another. It may be that the later dithyramb as well as the elevated epic tradition contributed largely to the deep seriousness, lofty scale, and magnitude which tragedy ultimately assumed.[10]

For our present purposes there is no need to probe further into the origins of Greek tragedy. Two important conclusions can be drawn which should help us in our analysis of the inner character of these plays. In the first place, we are in a position to understand the importance of the Chorus when we realize that the tragedy virtually grew around it as a centre. The plays would never have had the peculiar inner quality which they do possess if in their origins there had not been a strong lyrico-choral element. And secondly, we find by looking into its prior history, that Greek tragedy had its origin in religion. After all, the dithyramb had as its function religious ritual; it was created for the purpose of doing honour to the god and was a part of his worship. We must not

[10] For the vexed question of the origin of tragedy, readers are referred to the following books: G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (Boston, 1920); A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Oxford, 1927); R. C. Flickinger, *The Greek Theater and its Drama*, 4th ed. (Chicago, 1936); and Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, 1938). The relevant passages for the problem in Aristotle are to be found in the earlier sections of the *Poetics*, particularly Chapter IV.

forget that even in the fifth century the dramatic performances in the *Greater Dionysia* were still an integral part of a very elaborate religious service. The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens lay within the sacred precinct of the god. The very altar in the centre of the *orchestra* was not primarily a stage property, though the dramatists sometimes took advantage of its presence there, but it was a real religious altar. Behind the *skene* were temples dedicated to the god. Hence it is no wonder that the Greek drama tends to be more religious than secular. In certain respects it seems even to resemble the mediaeval mystery play. On the basis then of its prior history we can easily see why Greek tragedy in its inner essence is serious, solemn, and "poetic," and why it characteristically is preoccupied with fundamental religious problems—the nature of God or the gods, the relationship of the human and the divine, or the nature of God's ways to man.

The most important document to come out of antiquity concerning Greek tragedy is of course the justly famous *Poetics* of Aristotle. No reader of these Greek plays should fail to consult this most extraordinary piece of critical writing. Aristotle possessed perhaps the best analytical mind that has ever been known, and when in the course of his studies he sought to explain the nature of these great Greek plays, he brought to bear all his powers upon his problem. In the *Poetics,* though it was written some fifty or seventy-five years after the heyday of Greek tragedy, Aristotle devotes himself almost exclusively to this form of art.

Upon analysis Aristotle concludes that there are in tragedy six basic elements which he calls Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Song. However, preliminary to his whole study in the *Poetics,* he introduces the conception of *mimesis,* or "imitation," which Plato had already used before him, as fundamental to the phenomena of art. In saying that the artist "imitates" his models, Aristotle does not use the word in its primary sense of "copying," but rather is seeking to give a secondary meaning to the term. By the word he seems to mean the process which takes place when an artist creates his work of art. It is through *mimesis* that form comes to be imposed upon the artist's material, broadly conceived. Aristotle insists that "poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature of universals, whereas those of history are singulars." [11] Hence poetry "imitates" universals, and the process of *mimesis* produces a resultant work of art in which the "universal" aspect constitutes the very essence. Aristotle classifies the six basic elements according to the rôle each of them occupies in the process of artistic "imitation." He maintains that Diction and Song refer to the medium of "imitation,"

[11] *Poetics,* Chapter IX, Bywater's translation.

Spectacle to the manner of "imitation," while Plot, Character, and Thought refer to the objects of "imitation." Of the six elements Aristotle holds that Plot is the most important, with Character second.

An acquaintance with these six elements and with the Aristotelian conception of *mimesis* are necessary preliminaries to an understanding of his famous definition of tragedy. Aristotle defines it in these words: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these and similar emotions." [12] Aristotle's analysis and definition contain much that is valuable for one who is endeavouring to comprehend the inner nature of Greek tragedy. First, in his analysis of the elements he has shown that the dramatic synthesis is rich and complicated. He likewise properly emphasizes the elements of Plot and Character. Second, in the definition he insists upon its essential seriousness, its completeness, that is, its unity as an artistic whole, and its "magnitude," that is, its scale and elevation, which in some way raises it above the ordinary run of things human. Furthermore, he indicates what he believes the function of tragedy to be, the *catharsis*, or "proper purgation" of pity, fear, and similar emotions. Scholars have argued at great length over the precise meaning of *catharsis*. For our present purposes it is enough to note that Aristotle believes that tragedy by its very nature arouses, stimulates, involves or "purges" in the spectator the emotions of pity, fear and their like. Tragedy hence must have in its inner essence a peculiar quality which always produces these particular emotional responses.

One more conception of Aristotle in the *Poetics*, his theory of the ideal tragic hero and the "tragic flaw," merits our attention. Probably in the criticism of tragedy no other theory has received such wide acceptance. It is very frequently used, of course, in the criticism of Shakespeare's tragedies. We hear much of Macbeth and his overwhelming ambition, of Othello and his jealousy. It must be said that the theory has often led to superficial and over-simplified critical opinions, to the notion that, if one has discovered the hero's "tragic flaw," he has satisfactorily apprehended and comprehended the particular tragedy in question. Aristotle states his theory in Chapter XIII of the *Poetics*. He says that tragedy must involve a change of fortune for a character, but this personage cannot be a completely virtuous man passing from fortune to misfortune, because this would be simply odious to the spectator. Nor can it involve a bad man passing from misery to happiness, because this would out-

[12] *Poetics*, Chapter VI, Butcher's translation, with a slight modification.

rage our human feelings, our moral sense, and accordingly no appropriate tragic emotions would be aroused within us. Nor again can it involve a bad man passing from happiness to misery. Perhaps this would satisfy the moral sense, but it again would not arouse in us the appropriate tragic emotions. Hence Aristotle defines the ideal tragic hero in these words: "A man who is highly renowned and prosperous, but one who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty." [13]

There are several points to be particularly noted concerning Aristotle's conception of tragedy. First of all, he emphasizes the human element and insists implicitly that tragedy involves human beings. Second, he emphasizes the single individual in his argument concerning the tragic hero. Furthermore, he recognizes in human life states of happiness and misery, fortune and misfortune, in and out of which men pass. Here also he both implicitly and explicitly rejects the mechanical conception of "poetic justice," that the good prosper and the evil suffer. Aristotle likewise assumes the existence of some kind of moral order in the universe, as well as, by implication, the element of chance or luck, which may be possibly extended to include fate or destiny. In summary, then, for Aristotle tragedy is serious and elevated. It involves emotions of a particular sort. It looks at man and his states, in a world in which there is an element of chance or fate, but in which, at least so far as man himself is concerned, there is a definite moral order in some sort, and not moral chaos.

Anyone who reads tragedy of any sort must ultimately face the question, "What, after all, is tragedy?" Aristotle's answer to this question has been outlined. As one reads the Greek tragedies for the first time, he gradually formulates his critical opinions concerning them. More often than not the reader will take his conception of Shakespearean tragedy and apply it as a critical foot-rule to the Greek examples and judge accordingly. This method is at bottom unsound, as it would be if the process were reversed, that is, if one judged the tragedies of Shakespeare according to criteria derived solely from Greek tragedy. What is needed, therefore, is some kind of generic conception of tragedy, based upon empirical data drawn from all sources to which the terms "tragedy" or "the tragic" have been applied, under which all the various species may be subsumed. Only on these conditions will judgments of value, either single or comparative, be based upon a sound foundation.

Before attempting to outline such a generic conception of tragedy, it might be well to consider for a moment A. C. Bradley's famous interpretation of Shakespearean tragedy. In the beginning of his analysis

[13] This translation is indebted both to Butcher and Bywater.

Bradley maintains that tragedy is a story of human actions producing exceptional calamity and ending in the death of a man in high estate.[14] He further argues that the hero is usually a good man, certainly one who possesses qualities of greatness or nobility; in short, he is not mean or contemptible or small. The catastrophe which befalls this hero, in Bradley's view, gives one the dominating impression of waste. Furthermore, the critic holds that in these plays all human activity takes place in a world that has as its predominating feature a moral order which is good. Somehow or other, in some mysterious way, this "fate" or moral order reacts violently and convulsively against all infractions thereof. From this reaction comes the calamity, which is often far out of proportion with the infraction, and also from this arises the terrific waste. Such, very briefly, is Bradley's interpretation, and it must be remembered that he is specifically confining himself to Shakespearean tragedy.

It is obvious that Greek and Shakespearean tragedy have certain elements in common, as well as certain specific differences. Hence any general theory of tragedy must be of wide enough scope to include within it these two types, which represent the very best in the tragic literature of Western Europe. Furthermore, any effort to get at the essence of tragedy or "the tragic" must not confine itself to the limitation of the dramatic form. Also, as a preliminary to an analysis of the tragic, it is expedient to rule out, for the moment at least, the world of nature and experience. Let us not now take into consideration railroad wrecks, automobile accidents, cyclones, earthquakes, and all other such occurrences which insurance companies in their policies so curiously label "acts of God." Hence in the coming analysis we shall only be concerned with tragedy or the tragic in literature.[15]

Perhaps at the outset it will be best to proceed by defining negatively, that is, by indicating first as clearly as possible that which tragedy is not. Tragedy is not the sheerly horrible, which provokes only revulsion and loathing, although horror may be an aspect of tragedy. Next, it does not appear to the purely pathetic or pitiful. This provokes a kind of patronizing pity, where the object may be scorned or held contemptible. Conversely, tragedy seems to focus our attention on a level above ourselves, and yet at the same time it involves pity or sympathy in some sort, as Aristotle clearly saw. Again, tragedy is not the purely terrible or terrifying, which provokes stark fright, the characteristic reaction to sheer melodrama. However, the terrible or the fearful may well become an element in the tragic, again as Aristotle clearly saw.

[14] Cf. *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd ed. (London, 1932) p. 16.

[15] It is only for convenience that we are confining ourselves to literature. If the analysis is sound at all, it can be applied to the other artistic media which are capable of expressing "the tragic."

Now we are in a position to attempt a positive formulation. Tragedy or the tragic always makes certain basic assumptions. In the first place, it always seems to assume the fundamental dignity and worth of man. It assumes that somehow or other human life is meaningful and valuable. It would never finally accept Macbeth's evaluation of life:

> It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

It follows, therefore, that tragedy must concern itself with human values of many sorts, man's happiness and misery, and all that these conceptions involve.

As a corollary to this first assumption there is a second which tragedy always appears to make. It assumes that, complex though man be, he possesses a will, in some sense a will that is free, and that he is likewise in some sense responsible for his actions. The tragic asserts that man is somehow free to choose his course of action and that through his free choice, his character is essentially revealed. For the present argument it makes no difference whether man actually has free will or not—whether certain philosophers and psychologists are right in denying free will to man, or whether Dr. Johnson said the last word on the problem when he remarked, "All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it." [16] Whatever may be the actual answer to the problem, tragedy, or the tragic assumes that man has free will, and when one finds himself in the realm of the tragic, it can only be meaningful to him if he realizes that tragedy has made that assumption. If man is portrayed as a complete puppet, even though at times it may seem so, if the blinded Gloucester in *King Lear* is right when he cries,

> As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,
> They kill us for their sport.

—then there can be no tragedy. If man is a puppet, then he is mean, contemptible, and nothing worth. But tragedy in its entirety, even when it portrays man as he is swept to his doom by blind forces over which he has no control, seems to affirm that he is not mean and not contemptible.

The other assumption which tragedy seems consistently to make is that over and above man there exists some superhuman power or force. This force appears under various names and in different forms. In Bradley's interpretation of Shakespeare's essentially secular tragedy, it is the mysterious "moral order." In the essentially religious Greek tragedy

[16] Cf. P. E. More, *The Sceptical Approach to Religion* (Princeton, 1934) p. 27.

it is represented by the gods or the vaguer personifications of supernatural powers. Elsewhere, it may be the Christian God or Fate or Destiny. Call it any name one will, tragedy always presents man as living under something divine or superhuman which partially determines his actions.

It may be argued then that these are the three basic assumptions of tragedy: first, the dignity of man, second, the freedom of his will and his responsibility for the use which he makes of that will, and third, the existence in the universe of a superhuman factor. It may be further suggested that, having made these assumptions, tragedy is fundamentally oriented towards the problem of evil, either explicitly or implicitly. It faces squarely the fact of evil in the world, that there is misery in man's life, which is a life to be ended by the mystery of death. Sometimes tragedy grapples directly with the problem as is the case in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and *Oresteia*. Perhaps it is because of their direct attack upon the essence of evil that these plays achieve a scale and universality never reached in Shakespeare. Sometimes the orientation is more implicit, as it is in Euripides' *Hippolytus,* for example, or in *Hamlet,* or *Othello,* or *Oedipus the King,* or *The Bacchae*. The action of all these plays illustrates the working of one aspect of evil or another, and provides in a sense material out of which one can construct some terms upon which the fact of evil can be faced. Therefore, rather than maintain with Aristotle and Bradley that tragedy occurs only in connection with a tragic hero and his "tragic flaw," it seems better to insist upon a wider scope, a genus which will include the Aristotelian type as one of its most important species, namely, that tragedy makes the three assumptions with respect to man's life, and then places him over against the everlasting and eternally mysterious question of evil. Then and only then does tragedy arise, but it is important to note that this does not mean utter defeat for man, since the first assumption is that man's life is meaningful. That there is not utter defeat in true tragedy seems to be at the very core of Horatio's last lines of farewell to Hamlet:

> Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

And may it not be that there are those who seek to interpret life, make the three assumptions of the tragic, face the problem of evil, and call life a tragedy, but never defeat?

Of the many writers of Greek tragedy only Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are represented in the collection of plays which have survived, and even this collection includes but a small fraction of the total number of dramas which these men wrote. Aeschylus, the earliest of the three,

was born of a rather prominent family in Athens in 525 B.C., at a time long before the city had achieved much distinction among the peoples of the Greek area. Of his life we possess but the scantiest information, most of it deriving from a short biographical sketch which is prefixed to one of the manuscripts of his plays. In addition to this sketch, scattered references in other sources acquaint us with several legendary traditions which grew up concerning the poet's life. For example, we are told that while Aeschylus was a boy, the god Dionysus appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to write tragedies. There was also a tradition, probably arising from the religious and philosophical character of his plays, that he was a Pythagorean, a member of that curious philosophical, religious, and scientific brotherhood. He was also said to have been an initiate in the Eleusinian mysteries, and at one time was supposed to have been accused of impiety for having divulged the secrets of the cult.

Aeschylus first competed in the dramatic contests in Athens in 499 B.C. He achieved his first victory in 484 B.C. and continued from then on to be highly successful in the theatre. Aside from his dramatic activity, he apparently gained distinction in military affairs, having fought both at Marathon and Salamis. In all, he wrote approximately ninety plays, of which only seven have survived. We are told that he won first prizes in competition on thirteen occasions, his last victory occurring in 458 B.C. with his great trilogy, the *Oresteia*. He died in 455 B.C. while in Sicily, where he had gone shortly after his final tragic competition. It should be noted that Aeschylus in the latter part of his life must have been a direct witness of Athens' breath-taking ascent to supremacy in the Greek world during those years.

One reads Aeschylus' plays in their chronological order, and is immediately impressed by the great advances successively made in his dramatic technique. As we move from *The Suppliants,* where the Chorus figures so largely, on through *The Seven Against Thebes,* in which a "tragic hero" appears for the first time, down to the *Oresteia,* with its fully developed dramaturgy, we can see the steady growth of the poet's technical powers. If Aristotle is correct in saying that Aeschylus added the second actor, the poet must have been keenly aware of the dramatic potentialities of the somewhat rudimentary form in which he was working. Again if Aristotle is right in saying that Sophocles added the third actor, when we look at the *Oresteia,* we can see how quick Aeschylus was to take effective advantage of the excellent innovation which his younger competitor introduced.

From the seven remaining plays much can be discovered concerning the quality of Aeschylus' thought and the elevation of his style. The loftiness of Aeschylean language and imagery is most notable, even

though on some occasions the poet comes dangerously near bombast, a fact on which Aristophanes capitalized with great comic effect in *The Frogs*. However, Aeschylus' images possess a poetic depth and intensity which could only come from a mind driving deeply into the essence of that which it was seeking to express. Study of his plays immediately reveals that Aeschylus' primary interest is in religion and theology. To be sure, he considers human phenomena, but not on the human level, or as ends in themselves. Aeschylus rather studies human affairs as means of throwing light upon the problems of religion and theology, which he considered more universal and more significant. As a result of this basic orientation as well as the power of his insight, Aeschylus was able to present, at the close of his *Oresteia*, one of the greatest and most purified conceptions of godhead to be found in the writings of Western European civilization.

For general purposes of exposition it seems best to pass by Sophocles for the moment and turn to Euripides, who in many ways lies at the opposite extreme from Aeschylus in his basic interests. In connection with Euripides' life, we are again faced with scanty information. We know that he was born between the years 485 to 480 B.C., that is, approximately fifteen years after Aeschylus began to compete in the dramatic contests. We possess a number of short lives of Euripides which are prefixed to the manuscripts of his plays, as well as a longer fragmentary biography, written by a certain Satyrus in the third century B.C. Most of the information in these biographical sketches derives from the writings of comic poets who seemed to be exceptionally fond of ridiculing Euripides. For example, one common statement in the lives is that Euripides' mother was a purveyor of vegetables, a point which Aristophanes makes in his generally good-humoured raillery at the poet in *The Frogs*. Doubtless because Euripides exhibits in many of his choral passages an awareness of the pictorial, some of his biographers have insisted that he had studied painting. Also because Euripides has been unflinching in the delineation of his feminine characters,[17] the biographers concluded that this could never have happened, had he not had some bitter personal experience with women. Hence tradition has preserved apocryphal stories about his unhappy marital life.

During his lifetime Euripides presented approximately eighty-eight plays, though he wrote in all about ninety-two. In the contests he was successful only four times, probably because his somewhat new and unorthodox views did not find immediate favour with the public. Certainly there is a strong strain of scepticism in his writing, and one be-

[17] This apparently also accounts for Euripides' reputation as a misogynist. Cf., for example, Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*.

comes aware of the increasing doubt and uncertainty which pervade the plays, particularly those written towards the close of the Peloponnesian War, when Athens, the great city of ante-bellum days, was tottering upon the brink of ruin. Though Euripides' plays were not well received during his life, it is evident that after his death, during the fourth century B.C. and later, he was by far the most popular of the three tragedians. This fact is attested by the number of indubitable plays of Euripides which have been preserved, seventeen tragedies and one satyr-play. Another piece, the *Rhesus,* is also ascribed to the dramatist though its genuineness has been frequently doubted. Despite the many accounts of Euripides' death which have survived, we know nothing definite about it. We do know, however, that he left Athens for the court of King Archelaus of Macedonia in about 408 B.C. and died there in 406 B.C.

Euripides does not rank high as a dramatic technician. Indeed, there is evidence throughout his plays of faulty construction. His greatest claims to fame, however, rest on his superb studies of human problems considered on the human level, his penetrating psychological analyses of his characters, his capacity to create genuine pathos, his sense of the dramatic possibilities of an individual scene, and his ability by means of dramatic innovations to reinterpret the traditional legends upon which all the dramatists relied for their material. Such plays as the *Alcestis* or *Medea* may serve to illustrate his treatment of human problems. They contain, as well, evidence of his power to study psychologically his characters, the excellence of which is likewise evinced in his portrayal of such characters as Phaedra in the *Hippolytus,* Electra in the *Electra,* and many others too numerous to mention. His pathos is perhaps best seen in *The Trojan Women,* while his sense for the dramatic in the individual scene is most evident in his melodramatic plays, such as the *Orestes, Iphigenia in Tauris,* or *Helen.* His reinterpretations of the old material are excellently illustrated by the *Electra* or *The Phoenissae.*

Euripides had a profound influence upon the drama. He seems to have shaken the domination which the traditional sagas exerted upon the playwrights; he reduced the importance of the Chorus, until it only served to provide lyric interludes between actual dramatic scenes, but above all he raised to supreme importance the study of character. Unlike Aeschylus he is not predominantly interested in religion and theology, but rather in ethical problems, in human beings face to face with the pain and evil of human life, as they exhibit now strength and now pathetic weakness. Although he never consistently formulates his ideas concerning the gods or the superhuman elements in the universe, he nevertheless seems to believe that they exist and are relevant to human life in some way or other. *The Bacchae,* enigmatic as it is, seems clearly to affirm this position.

Critics tend to attack him for the inadequate carpentering of his plays. Perhaps his reply would be that he really did not care if he overworked the awkward *deus ex machina,* if at the same time he had been successful in portraying completely the inner states of his characters and their problems, in scenes of individual dramatic intensity. It is therefore easy to see how Euripides broke the ground for the modern drama by his freedom in handling plot and his minute study of character. He may be the inferior of Aeschylus and Sophocles in scale and grandeur, but by virtue of his own particular excellences he laid down the lines along which dramatic art has developed. As one critic has well said, "Remove Euripides and the modern theatre ceases to exist." [18]

There remains to consider Sophocles, the great mediating figure between Aeschylus and Euripides. He was born about 495 B.C., some ten years or so before the birth of Euripides, and lived to the great age of ninety, when he died about 405 B.C., surviving his younger contemporary by approximately a year. The poet's family was wealthy, and he himself served in public office on several occasions. In the main, however, he devoted himself completely to the theatre and in all wrote about one hundred twenty-five plays of which now there are but seven extant, and unfortunately none of these derives from the first twenty-five years of his creative activity. His plays met with wide popular success, as is indicated by his twenty victories in tragic competition. Unlike Euripides, who, as we have already noted, became bitterly disillusioned towards the end of his life, and whose works show evidence of this change of temper, Sophocles in his plays seems to maintain a consistent and firm approach to the problems of tragedy.

Because of his well-nigh perfect craftsmanship as well as his depth of understanding, critics have always found Sophocles most difficult to appraise. They all too often utter empty-sounding clichés on the "calm and serenity" of Sophocles' attitude towards life, and hence they are prone to argue that he lived a serene and calm life himself. They even point to his good fortune in having died before the defeat of Athens. There is much about Sophocles' formulation of life, as it is seen through the medium of his tragedies, that gives foundation for these critical utterances, but we must not forget that the purity and the clarity of the formulation could only have resulted from a deep experience of life that must have been at best difficult. After all Sophocles lived through the same years that brought disillusion to Euripides, but the elder poet apparently had enough strength to hold his views steadily, and to rise above the forces which seem to have broken Euripides' spirit.

Sophocles' mastery of dramatic technique is apparent in all his plays,

[18] D. C. Stuart, *The Development of Dramatic Art* (New York, 1928) p. 100.

most notably, of course, in *Oedipus the King*. Likewise in this tragedy, as well as in such others as the *Ajax* or *Philoctetes* he demonstrated his ability to use with overwhelming effectiveness the device of dramatic irony. But his greatest excellence clearly lies in his general view of life, which can scarcely be communicated in the necessarily conceptual terms of criticism. However, it is most clearly expressed in two great choral odes, one on the wonders of man in the *Antigone* (lines 332–367) and the other on the laws of Heaven in *Oedipus the King* (lines 863–910). In the first of these Sophocles eloquently asserts the dignity, worth and value of man, even though there is death that he cannot conquer. In the second the poet proclaims his belief in a mysterious and powerful force behind the universe which sets and ordains the eternal laws of the world, which are holy, though ultimately incomprehensible to man. These seem to be the two fundamental aspects of Sophocles' view of life: man the marvel working out his own destiny, making his own choices, but under the guidance of Heaven and its everlasting laws. Sophocles concentrates on the continual interaction of these two aspects. So Neoptolemus in the *Philoctetes* struggles, torn by the claims of personal integrity and devotion to his nation. And so struggles Oedipus, who has transgressed unwittingly a law of Heaven, but who through iron and inflexible will endeavours to work out his destiny and to assume his responsibility in a world in which human and divine elements are wholly interfused.

We have maintained that Aeschylus' basic orientation was towards theology and religion. On the other hand, we have insisted that Euripides was predominantly interested in human beings, on the human level, in their psychological states as they face the complex problems of human life. In a curious way Sophocles lies in a mean between these two poets, and seems to combine in himself their outstanding powers. He has the scale of Aeschylus plus Euripides' power of psychological analysis. He studies his human characters psychologically in their human environment, and yet he manages to approach the elevation of Aeschylus. In his plays dealing with the ruling house of Thebes, he analyzes, as Aeschylus did in the *Oresteia*, the phenomenon of a curse upon the house, of sin begetting sin. But in Sophocles there is always present the interplay of the divine and human. He remains on the human level, yet always directs his gaze towards that which is superhuman. It is the miracle of Sophocles' genius which has enabled him to express in his seven extant plays this interpretation of life, so deep and comprehensive that it has rarely if ever been equalled in the creative literature of Western Europe.

W. J. O.

II. Comedy

THE origins and early history of this form of dramatic art are at least as obscure as those of tragedy, and here too the procedure will be to begin with an examination of the documents which we possess and then to deduce what we can concerning their lost antecedents. The prospects of such a study seem at first sight to be very good indeed, for there are many things in the extant comedies of the fifth century that look exceptionally archaic, explicable only as survivals of some elaborate and primitive ritual which should be easy to reconstruct. A closer acquaintance, however, reveals that the problem admits of no very facile or satisfactory solution.

In a number of its broadest aspects the comedy of the fifth century resembles tragedy. It was performed at festivals of Dionysus under the aegis of the Athenian state. Its expenses were met in the same manner as those of tragedy and the rivalry of the poets competing for the prizes was just as keen. It was performed in the same theatre before the same type of audience, by a chorus of about the same size [1] and by an equally limited number of actors. Its structure shows many of the characteristic features of the mature tragic drama, such as *prologue, parodos,* and *exodos,* and the main body of both types of play consists of a series of relatively short scenes separated by choral interludes. The *prologues* of fifth-century comedy are not usually composed with much care or skill, and the situation is often explained to the spectators by one of the actors in a long and undramatic speech reminiscent of the Euripidean *prologue,* but we nowhere find a comic *prologue* consisting entirely of such a speech. The comic *parodos* is much more complicated and dramatic than the one usually found in the tragic play, and it contains peculiarities of form that are unknown in tragedy, but these may be more conveniently treated later on. The special interest of the comic *exodos* derives not from its form, which is quite free, but from its contents, and it too may best be considered in another connection. It is in the choral interludes between scenes that the unique features of the form and the structure of comedy are most evident. Whereas in tragedy these performances of the Chorus, for all their differences in contents and in metre, almost invariably have the standardized form of the *stasimon,* in comedy they exhibit astonishing variety and frequent specialization. We shall turn our attention first to the most curious and most highly specialized of these interludes, the *parabasis.*[2]

[1] The actual number was twenty-four.

[2] The extant *parabases* are: *Ach.* 626–718, *Kn.* 498–610, *Clouds* 510–626, *Wasps* 1009–1121, *Peace* 729–817, *Birds* 676–800, *Thesm.* 785–845, *Frogs* 674–737.

The typical fifth-century comedy falls into two well-defined parts, usually of more or less equal length. The first of these we find devoted to the creation of some incongruous situation, the second to the results of this, presented in a series of short scenes that have little dramatic coherence and no development. The function of the *parabasis* is to separate these two sections of the play. At the conclusion of the former the characters leave the stage to attend to some business that has resulted from the new situation, and the Leader of the Chorus wishes them well in a brief "tag" called the *kommation,* which is in some way or other metrically distinguished from the verse in which the preceding scene has been written. The *kommation* is followed by a passage approximately one hundred lines in length which quite interrupts the action of the comedy and is usually divorced from it absolutely, having no essential connection either with what has gone before or with what is to follow. Its dramatic utility is restricted to the creation of verisimilitude with respect to time, and we frequently find that the second part of the play presupposes the lapse of an appreciable interval during the delivery of the *parabasis.*

As soon as the actors have left the stage the Chorus turns and faces the audience while its Leader briefly announces that the *parabasis* will now be delivered. The lines in which this is proclaimed are to be regarded as part of the *kommation,* the function of which will thus be to cover the exits of the actors and the movements of the Chorus. Once these have been completed the Leader addresses the audience directly, speaking as though he were the poet himself, in a passage of varying length called the *anapests,* from the metre in which it is usually composed. The contents of the *anapests* differ widely in the various comedies, but political advice to the Athenian populace and defence by the poet of his literary productions are amongst the most frequent motifs. The normal emotional disposition is a crescendo of excitement, which reaches its culmination in a connected passage several lines in length, delivered at full speed and in one breath, and aptly named *pnigos* or "choker." After the *pnigos* comes one of those astounding changes of mood and manner peculiar to fifth-century comedy and extremely difficult for us to follow. There is a moment of silence; then the First Semi-Chorus sings the *ode,* a relatively short passage in simple lyric metres and not divided into *strophe* and *antistrophe.* The subjects of the *odes* are most frequently religious and the atmosphere is nearly always serious, sometimes even wistful or sad. In them we find some of the finest lyric poetry that Greece has given us. But as we read one of these early comedies and come abruptly from the satirical extravagance of the *pnigos* to the haunting beauty of the *ode* we have to exert ourselves mightily in order to effect the emotional readjustment that is necessary, and we cannot refrain from wondering

at, and perhaps envying, the sensitivity and the flexibility of the Athenian heart.

The lyric moment is brief, and the comic spirit as we understand it soon returns, heralded occasionally by an unexpected incongruity in the last words of the *ode*. The next part of the *parabasis* is called the *epirrheme* and is addressed to the audience by the Leader of the First Semi-Chorus. It is usually about sixteen lines long and its metre is trochaic; it may have been delivered in a sort of recitative style, but the important point is that it was not lyric. Its atmosphere and its subjects are more or less similar to those of the *anapests*, but discussions of literary matters are not usually found. A more significant difference lies in the fact that the sentiments expressed are, ostensibly at least, those of the Chorus rather than of the poet. At the conclusion of the *epirrheme* we are called upon to readjust our emotions again, for the Second Semi-Chorus now sings the *antode*, which is quite similar to the *ode* in mood and manner and responds to it metrically just as *strophe* to *antistrophe* in the tragic *stasimon*. The final portion of the *parabasis* necessitates a third emotional revolution, and the *antepirrheme* brings us back once again to the "comic" atmosphere. It is delivered by the Leader of the Second Semi-Chorus and its subjects are similar to those of the *epirrheme;* it is in the same trochaic metre and contains the same number of lines. As soon as the *antepirrheme* has been delivered the characters return to the stage and the second part of the comedy begins.

Such is the *parabasis* of the early Greek comedy. In its complete form it contains seven parts, which fall into two groups. The first three, *kommation, anapests,* and *pnigos,* are called the *hapla* (simple) because they exhibit no strophic responsion. As a group they occur only in the *parabasis*. The last four parts, however, *ode, epirrheme, antode,* and *antepirrheme,* constitute a structure known as the *epirrhematic syzygy,* which is frequently found in all parts of fifth-century comedy and must be regarded as the most significant and characteristic formal peculiarity of this branch of the Greek drama. As represented in the *parabasis* the *epirrhematic syzygy* is incomplete; in the full form the *epirrheme* culminates in a *pnigos* and the *antepirrheme* in an *antipnigos*. On the other hand the exact responsion of *epirrheme* and *antepirrheme* in the *parabasis* is but seldom encountered elsewhere. Both of these facts are indicative of the great flexibility and adaptability of the *epirrhematic syzygy,* and its many and varied uses consistently illustrate the principle that strictness of form in the *syzygy* is in inverse ratio to the dramatic values of the scene in which it is employed. The omission of the two *pnige* in the *parabasis* is undoubtedly due to the fact that the *hapla* already contain one such passage; three of them would be

a bit too much. But in the other uses of the *syzygy* these *pnige* are, for dramatic reasons, absent as often as present, and we may therefore regard them, not as essential features of the *syzygy*, but rather as a kind of specialized appendage to the *epirrhemes*. The *syzygy* can thus be studied primarily in the form in which we find it in the *parabasis*, and the most important feature of it is that it contains four parts, of which two are lyric and two are not, arranged in an alternate or interlocking system of responsion peculiar to comedy and quite different from the successive responsion characteristic of the tragic *stasimon*.

Inequality in number of lines in the *epirrhemes* is not the only respect in which the *syzygy* exhibits variation as it is adapted to different dramatic needs. In the *parabasis* the *ode* always comes first, but elsewhere we find the *epirrheme* in this position, and occasionally the order is *ode epirrheme antepirrheme antode*. In the *parabasis* the metre of the *epirrhemes* is always trochaic, but elsewhere we find a number of other kinds of verse employed, and sometimes the *antepirrheme* is in a metre different from that of the *epirrheme*. In the *parabasis* the *epirrhemes* are always delivered by the Leaders of the Semi-Choruses, but elsewhere this is often done by the actors, and in many of these cases the *epirrhemes* consist of dialogue in which as many as four speakers may take part. The non-lyric members of the *syzygy* are thus susceptible of manifold variation, and it is on this that the adaptability of the whole structure depends. The *ode* and the *antode* exhibit a consistent rigidity of formal structure, and the principle of exact responsion is never violated. Such was the power of the convention which governed the composition of all choral lyric poetry. An approach to adaptation of the lyric parts of the *syzygy* to dramatic needs is seen in a few cases in which the rendition is divided between the Chorus and one of the actors, but such exceptional instances provide additional evidence of the strength of the tradition of strict responsion, for the distribution of lines is always exactly the same in both *ode* and *antode*.

Such are the forms which the *epirrhematic syzygy* can assume; we may now proceed to an examination of the uses to which it is put. Functionally the *parabasis* is nothing but the most specialized and most undramatic of the choral interludes in comedy. In view of the fact that an analysis of its structure reveals it to be merely a strictly formal *syzygy* with its own peculiar *hapla* prefixed, we might reasonably expect that most of the other choral interludes would be *syzygies* of a less rigid construction, lacking any additional features. Interludes of this sort do indeed occur,[3] but it is noteworthy that they are almost as undramatic

[3] *Kn.* 1264–1315, *Wasps* 1265–1291, *Peace* 1127–1190 (with both *pnige*), *Birds* 1058–1117.

as the *parabasis* itself; their subject matter is just as thoroughly divorced from the action of the play, and the *epirrhemes* are delivered by the Leader of the Chorus or the Leaders of the Semi-Choruses. Furthermore, it is not improbable that the Chorus turned and faced the audience on such occasions, for traces of the *kommation* sometimes appear. On the formal side we find exact responsion in the *epirrhemes,* which sometimes culminates in *pnige.* Such *syzygies* may, with reference to their contents and structure, be called *hypoparabases,* but in the economy of the drama their function is that of the *stasimon* in tragedy; they are in this respect quite unspecialized, since they serve to separate, not the two halves of the play, but merely two individual scenes in it. Such *syzygies* occur only in the latter halves of those comedies in which they are found at all.

In choral interludes of this anticipated type the adaptation of the *epirrhematic syzygy* to dramatic requirements is very slight. Usually we can observe a more elaborate adaptation, in which the functions of two successive tragic *stasima* are assumed by the *ode* and the *antode* of a *syzygy;* the scenes thus defined are composed in pairs, and even though they are dialogue, with two or more speakers, and are written in iambic trimeters, they are essentially and formally the *epirrhemes* of a *syzygy* which differs from those in the *parabases* chiefly in being really a part of the dramatic economy of the play. As a result of this we find that such *episodic syzygies,* to give them a special term, are far less rigid in the formal features of their *epirrhemes,* and exact responsion is hardly ever observable. Really violent inequalities, however, very seldom occur, and even a maximum adaptation to dramatic requirements and a minimum strictness of form cannot entirely conceal the kinship of such pairs of scenes with the highly conventional *syzygies* which we find in the *parabases.*[4]

The lack of dramatic development in the series of short scenes which follow the *parabasis* makes this portion of the play ideally suited to the composition of *episodic syzygies,* and they are more numerous here than anywhere else, but the *parodos* also frequently contains one or more *syzygies,* which are extensively adapted to the generally dramatic character of this part of the comedy and consequently show little strictness of form in their non-lyric elements. The chief difference between them and the episodic variety is a matter of length; normally those in the *parodos* are relatively short.[5] A further point to be noted is that the relation be-

[4] The *episodic syzygies* are: *Ach.* 346–392, 393–571, 1000–1068; *Kn.* 611–755; *Peace* 819–921, 922–1038; *Birds* 801–902, 1118–1266, 1494–1705; *Frogs* 460–604.

[5] The *parodic syzygies* are: *Ach.* 204–233, 284–346; *Clouds* 263–313; *Wasps* 333–402, 403–525; *Lys.* 254–285.

tween the *parodos* as a whole and the *syzygies* which it contains is the same as that which exists between the latter half of the comedy and its *episodic syzygies*. In both cases we seem to be dealing with an extension to a new use of a formal structure not originally indigenous to these parts of the play, whereas the *syzygy* looks like an essential and primordial feature of the *parabasis*.

The same may be said of the *agon*, the last of the formal peculiarities of fifth-century comedy which we have to examine.[6] Generally to be described as a highly conventional debate, the *agon* is functionally not nearly so undramatic and formally not quite so strict as the *parabasis*, but it is structurally even more elaborate. For obvious reasons it is usually found in the first half of the typical fifth-century comedy. The establishment of the new and incongruous situation inevitably encounters determined opposition from some defender of the old order, and the resultant conflict usually begins with deeds and ends with words. As soon as both of the combatants have agreed to settle their differences in orderly debate, the *agon* is opened with the singing of the *ode* by the Chorus. This usually contains some comment on the issues involved in the debate; occasionally we find it interrupted by spoken lines from one or both of the combatants. After the *ode* the Leader of the Chorus instructs one of the opposing parties to present his case; this command always fills exactly two lines and is called the *katakeleusmos*. The designated party, who always turns out to be the loser of the debate, then expounds his views in the *epirrheme*, which is never a single speech, but is interrupted, frequently or infrequently, by the defender of the other side. The pleader normally grows more and more fervid and excited, finally winding up with a *pnigos*. The four parts are then repeated. The Chorus sings the *antode*, and in the two-line *antikatakeleusmos* the Leader bids the other combatant state his views. This is done in the *antepirrheme* and *antipnigos*. The *agon* is sometimes concluded with the *sphragis*, a few lines spoken by the Leader of the Chorus announcing the winner of the debate, but this exceedingly archaic feature is more often absent than present in the comedies that have come down to us.

Like the *parabasis*, the *agon* is evidently nothing but a highly specialized *epirrhematic syzygy*, formally distinguished by the preservation of both the *pnige* and by the presence of the conventional two-line *katakeleusmoi*, which are found nowhere else. It differs from the *parabasis* mainly in the fact that its contents are an organic part of the play, and a certain amount of adaptation to dramatic requirements is accordingly necessary. This is reflected in the composition of the *epirrhemes*,

[6] The extant *agons* are: *Kn.* 756–941, *Clouds* 950–1104, *Wasps* 526–724, *Birds* 451–628, *Lys.* 476–613, *Frogs* 895–1098, *Eccl.* 571–709 (defective), *Plutus* 487–626 (defective).

which seldom contain exactly the same number of lines and are always delivered by more than one speaker. Occasionally we find a comic plot so arranged as to contain two conflicts, one of which is of course less important than the other. Such subordinate conflicts may lead to subordinate debates, and these are composed in the form of *epirrhematic syzygies* closely resembling the type proper to the principal debate; such *syzygies* may be called *hypagons*.[7] They differ from the regular *agons* chiefly in being much shorter and in lacking the *sphragis;* all the other parts of the *agon,* however, including the characteristic *katakeleusmoi,* are found in the *hypagon* also.

With this we conclude our examination of the formal peculiarities of fifth-century comedy. Out of a long line of special forms and a regrettable multitude of technical terms emerges the *epirrhematic syzygy,* the distinguishing characteristic of the comic type of dramatic composition, a theme that admits of many variations without ever losing its integrity. The adaptability of this form is such that we are able to construct a comedy almost entirely out of the materials which its different uses provide; a brief outline of such a drama will be at once the example and the demonstration of this proposition. In the *prologue* the revolutionary designs of the hero are explained, and he is about to materialize them when the Chorus enters and opposition develops. The feelings and the aims of this group are expressed in a short *syzygy* at the beginning of the *parodos;* a second *syzygy* contains their murderous threats against the hero, his pleas that they listen to reason, and the final acquiescence of the Chorus or the character who represents their cause. In the *agon* the opposed opinions are rationally tested and the revolutionary one is found to be the better; the opposition is won over and the new order becomes a *fait accompli.* The Chorus now delivers the *parabasis.* This is followed by two *episodic syzygies* in which four results of the revolution are presented. A fifth short scene adds yet another, which may have to be resolved in a *hypagon* or may be followed by a *hypoparabasis.* The *exodos* concludes the play amidst general rejoicing.

No such play has come down to us, but we may be certain that the middle years of the fifth century witnessed the production of numerous comedies of this type. But tragedy was a more mature and, for this reason if for no other, a more highly esteemed form of art; its influence, for better or worse, was therefore very strong and must at a very early date have begun to effect that pseudomorphosis which is the dominant feature of the history of comedy. This process had been going on for many years before 425 B.C., when Aristophanes produced *The Achar-*

[7] The *hypagons* are: *Kn.* 303–460, *Clouds* 1345–1451.

nians, the earliest comedy which we possess, and the story of tragic influence is writ large on all of this poet's compositions. But this is more relevant to the whole history of comedy than to its origins; for the latter only the purely comic peculiarities have any possible value. Our examination of these has carried us back at least to the year 450 and perhaps to a period even earlier than that, to a time when the more fully developed tragic form of dramatic art had not yet initiated the lengthy process of transforming comedy into something quite foreign to its original spirit and purpose. The strictly formal evidence which we have at our disposal enables us to penetrate one step further into the past. If we examine the typical comedy sketched above and seek to distinguish between aboriginal elements and later additions our eye lights first on the *prologue.* The earliest tragedies that we possess begin with the *parodos,* and we can hardly be unjustified in assuming that at one time comedy began in the same way. The adoption of the *prologue* will thus be the earliest example of tragic influence.

This is as far as we could go if we had only the formal peculiarities of comedy to guide us, but there are certain features of the contents of the extant plays that provide us with valuable supplementary evidence. We have already observed that the latter half of a fifth-century comedy is usually taken up with the results of the comic revolution effected in the first half. But the latter portion of the play usually contains two other motifs that look like survivals of ritual and hence bear the stamp of great antiquity. These are the *komos,* or communal feast, and the *gamos,* or ceremonial union of the sexes. Some of the comedies are so constructed that these conventional actions take place as natural outgrowths of the antecedent portions of the plot, but in others they are less well integrated, and we often find female characters introduced into the closing scenes merely for the purpose of making the *gamos* possible. The *komos* too is frequently disconnected from the scenes which precede it and is introduced without warning. The careless treatment of these motifs suggests that they had come to be felt as essentially foreign bodies, dramaturgically awkward, but retained in obedience to the dictates of prescriptive custom. We shall not be far wrong if we assume that at some point early in the history of comedy that portion of the performance which followed the *parabasis* consisted of nothing but the *komos* and the *gamos.* As this archaic form of comedy developed and grew longer and more complicated, the latter half admitted other motifs. The element of conflict present in the *agon* extended itself, and the earliest increations took the form of the expulsion of unwelcome guests from the feast. But the dramatic and humorous potentialities of such scenes were so great that the primordial *komos* and *gamos* came

to be relegated to a subordinate position and finally were altogether dispossessed.

We have now traced the history of comedy back to a period in which the plays consisted of *parodos, agon, parabasis,* and *komos-gamos.* This reconstruction is in the highest degree tentative and conjectural, but it is at least based on real evidence, which, though entirely internal and largely ambiguous, is nevertheless derived from genuine and extant documents. Any attempt, however, to penetrate still further into the past would be entirely jejune, for the obvious reason that it would have to draw its conclusions from materials which are themselves hypothetical reconstructions. The percentage of error thus becomes forbiddingly large, and the pleasures of free speculation under conditions so uncertain must not be allowed to blind us to the fact it is inevitably and distressingly ineffectual. We can, with a species of probability, carry the history of comedy back to a point at which derivation from some elaborate ritual sequence appears indubitable, but the fact that we possess no other evidence for the existence of such a rite means that an attempt to bridge the gap between the reconstructed form of early fifth-century comedy and its putative ritual ancestor will be a contribution to the study of religion rather than to the history of the drama.

So much for the origins of Greek comedy and its development down to 425 B.C. The chief general characteristic of its later history has already been indicated and our task in what follows is mainly to illustrate the victorious progress of tragic influence. But it must be confessed in advance that we are very inadequately equipped to trace this development; our documents are neither numerous nor well distributed chronologically. The literary historian customarily distinguishes three periods in the history of Greek comedy: the Old, which ended with the fifth century, the Middle, which lasted until about 340 B.C., and the New, whose best work was produced around 300, although plays of this type continued to be composed even down into the Christian era. Of all the thousands of comedies which were written in ancient Greece we possess just fourteen. Nine of these belong to the last quarter of the fifth century, two of them to the early years of the fourth; we do not know the dates of the remaining three, but they can hardly be earlier than 315 or later than 290. None of this triad is preserved entire, but we have enough to form a reasonably good notion of what their total qualities must have been. The materials are thus relatively abundant for the latest phase of the Old Comedy and for the best period of the New, where the close imitations of the Roman Terence supplement the extant work of Menander, but the Middle Comedy is very inadequately represented by a pair of plays from the earliest years of its long history. The most serious disadvantage, however, lies in the fact that our documents

are the work of but two poets and thus give us at best a very narrow view even of those periods which they most generously illustrate. Short fragments from a comedy, however numerous, give us no idea of the play as a whole, and in spite of a host of citations we are quite unable to evaluate the work of the contemporaries of Aristophanes and of Menander. For the Middle Comedy our situation is patently worse; we possess not a single play of Alexis or of Antiphanes, the most eminent and the most typical dramatists of that period. The history of Greek comedy can therefore not be written on the basis of the materials which we possess; all that we can do is to outline briefly some of the least obscure and most general facts of a long and apparently involved development.

We have already stated that the influence of tragedy is everywhere evident in the earliest comedies that have come down to us. This is remarkable chiefly on the formal side, and large portions of the plays are not epirrhematically composed, but rather exhibit the form of *episodes* separated by *stasima,* just as in tragedy.[8] The latest complete *parabasis* that we have is found in *The Birds,* which was produced in 414 B.C.[9] The *agon* is missing in *The Acharnians, Peace,* and *The Thesmophoriazusae.* On the side of contents we find an increasing preoccupation with subjects that are utopian or timeless, and the traditional satire on contemporary events and personages recedes more and more into the background. In the early fourth century we observe what appears to be a sudden decline in the importance of the Chorus. This may have been first brought about by the straitened economic circumstances in which Athens found herself after the Peloponnesian War, but it was destined to be permanent, and in the New Comedy the Chorus is merely an adventitious band of revellers which entertains the audience between the acts into which the plays of this period are divided. In *The Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* of Aristophanes there are several interludes of much the same character. As soon as the Chorus had been relegated to a subordinate position the formal victory of tragedy was practically complete, for the *epirrhematic syzygy* was no longer possible. Hence the *parabasis* disappeared and the *agon* became merely a dialogue debate between two of the actors. Certain of the characteristic motifs of the Old Comedy had a higher survival value, and traces of the *komos* and the *gamos* are frequently to be observed in the Middle Comedy and sometimes even

[8] The *stasima* in comedy are: *Ach.* 836–859, 971–999, 1143–1173; *Kn.* 973–996; *Clouds* 1303–1320; *Wasps* 1450–1473; *Birds* 1470–1493; *Thesm.* 947–1000, 1136–1159; *Frogs* 814–829, 875–884, 1099–1118, 1251–1260, 1370–1377, 1482–1499.

[9] The *parabasis* of *The Clouds* lacks the *pnigos,* that of *Peace* the *epirrhemes,* that of *The Thesmophoriazusae* the *ode, antode,* and *antepirrheme,* that of *The Frogs* all the *kapla.*

in the New. The loss of the *parabasis* meant that the play was no longer divided into two well-defined parts, and in the fourth century the comic revolution ceased to be a characteristic feature of the plot. Comedy grew increasingly less fantastic and more realistic, and it finally came to deal solely with individual human problems. The plots became more complicated and were constructed with more skill; motivations had to be psychologically sound and improbabilities were assiduously avoided. With all this went a change in character. The animal spirits and boisterous licence of the Old Comedy gradually vanished and a more rarefied atmosphere supervened. Uproarious laughter turned into a quiet smile, and the effort of the New Comedy is not so much to amuse as to entertain. But the contrast between the Old and the New Comedy is one between Aristophanes and Menander, and we therefore pass over to a consideration of the work of these two dramatists. The remarks to be made about them will be of the most general character; more specific discussions will be found in the introductions prefixed to each of their plays.

As is so often the case with ancient writers, we know next to nothing about the life of Aristophanes. Son of Philippus and Zenodora, he was born about 445 B.C. in the Cydathenaean deme in Attica. Typical of such information as we do possess about the poet are the facts that his family owned land in Aegina, and that he was bald at an early age. He aroused the ire but successfully weathered the attacks of the demagogue Cleon. He began to write when he was very young, and his first play, *The Banqueters,* was produced in 427 B.C., when he was but eighteen. He composed about forty comedies in all, but we do not know how often he was victorious. On several occasions he brought out his plays under other names, but we do not know why he did this. The date of his death is uncertain, but it must have been later than 387. The ancient critics, who could compare his merits with those of his contemporaries, unanimously regarded him as the greatest of the poets of the Old Comedy. The result of this is that only Aristophanes has come down to us, and we have to base our judgments of the Old Comedy solely on the work of its most eminent artist. We must remember that we may not be dealing with what is typical of the comic drama of the time, but rather with something exceptional and revolutionary, advanced beyond its time.

Representative or not, for us it is unique. There has never been anything quite like it since, and regrettably there will never be anything quite like it again. The effect of the initial impact of these plays is one of bewilderment. One rubs one's eyes and wonders whether it really can have happened. A closer acquaintance and a bit of sober reflection

disclose a number of distinct reasons for astonishment. The first of these is the absolute freedom of speech which the comic poet of the fifth century enjoyed. He might make fun, banteringly or bitterly, thoroughly and repeatedly, of anything; no person, no institution, no god, enjoyed the slightest vestige of immunity, and the Athenian populace seems to have enjoyed these libels and slanders so hugely that they did not even require that they be always amusing.

Equally astonishing is the pervading obscenity of the Old Comedy. This is so abundant and so varied that it cannot be ignored or excised. It is so closely interwoven into almost every part of these plays that to expurgate is to destroy. A bowdlerized Aristophanes may offer a selection of passages well adapted to teach Attic Greek to schoolboys, but it is not Aristophanes. It may even illustrate certain aspects of Attic life and it will contain some incomplete passages of fine lyric poetry, but what has been taken away is the very part of his work which the poet clearly took the greatest delight in composing. On the other hand the misguided hypocrite who salves his conscience and saves his face by misrepresenting Aristophanes' bawdiness as something too healthy to be prurient does the poet a disservice more subtle and more harmful than the honest and busy expurgator. There is no escaping the fact that Aristophanes wrote just as obscenely as he could on every possible occasion. If we would appreciate him properly we should bear this in mind and endeavour to cultivate the same attitude that he had; the most unhealthy approach is the denial of the obvious in the name of healthiness.

Another feature of these comedies that immediately strikes us is the lordly ease with which their author has evidently composed them. This is inseparably connected with another equally remarkable feature of them, their dramaturgical ineptitude. Almost all of them are very badly constructed. They have nothing approaching unity; their plots are never worked out in any satisfactory fashion, and they abound in the most incredible inconsistencies. Yet they are obviously written by a man of magnificent gifts whom we cannot reasonably suppose to have been incapable of removing such blemishes; indeed, his latest comedies show indubitably that he could turn out as well integrated a play as anyone could desire. In his earlier work, on the other hand, it is clear that he just did not care about such things, and this observation gives us the clue to the proper appreciation of his work.

The distinguishing characteristic of Aristophanes is his brilliant insouciance. Endowed by nature with an intellect of an exceptionally high order and an imagination inexhaustibly fertile, he exercised his talents in a medium ideally suited to them. His best comedies are nothing but concatenations of splendid and dazzling conceits which follow one

another in breathless abundance. He is never at a loss what to invent next; indeed, he hardly ever has time fully to exploit the humorous possibilities of one motif before he is occupied with another. A mind of this sort has no use for consistency, and that stodgy virtue may best be cultivated by the lesser talents, who need all the virtues they can get. An Aristophanes should not degrade himself by pretending to be an ordinary mortal.

It is from this point of view that we must approach him if we would avoid misunderstanding him. His brilliant insouciance makes him a lovable rogue, and we must not forget that Plato adored him. He has naturally been misunderstood, grossly and variously. He has a lot to say about himself, but hardly a word of it can be taken seriously. This would be an easy deduction from the quality of his mind, but he repeatedly proves it by his actions, for he blandly denies doing what he plainly and frequently does. His views on political and social questions have been eagerly and ponderously analysed, but this is mostly a waste of time and energy. He hated Cleon, so much is clear, but when he came to put his hate into a comedy it stifled his wit, and the result was *The Knights,* one of his poorest plays. It is safe to say that whenever his wit is functioning properly we have no hope of discovering what his real feelings were.

He has often been called unfair, but this righteous and foolish accusation results from an inadequate appreciation of the quality of his intellect. Fairness is nothing but a kind of static consistency, and Aristophanes had no taste for consistency of any sort. He treats everyone precisely as his fancy dictates, and it is absurd to expect him to do otherwise. The unique quality of his wit lies in the very fact that it is not fettered by any ethical standards. It is entirely pure, and we should be grateful that it is. We have the right to censure him only when his wit fails as wit, whether because his eminently ethical hatred of some demagogue has choked it, or because he himself has aimed ineptly, as he sometimes did.

Brilliance, however, was not his only gift, and his heart was as sensitive as his mind was keen. The soft side of his personality expresses itself in his lyrics, and here he astounds and delights us, at one moment with idyllic songs of the countryside, at another with lines of infinite tenderness and sympathy, particularly towards old men. Often in the midst of a lyric passage of great warmth and beauty something will touch off his wit, and a sentence that has begun in a gentle and sympathetic spirit will end with a devastating personal jibe or an uproarious bit of obscenity. The two sides of the poet's nature are not really separable; he can be both witty and lyrical, almost at one and the same moment. This strange and perfect blend of characteristics apparently so incompatible

makes Aristophanes a wonderful man to read, and we begin to understand why Plato loved the old rogue as he did; he must have been a wonderful man to know.

What we know about the life of Menander is briefly told. He was born at Athens in 342 B.C., the son of Diopithes and Hegesistrata, and nephew of Alexis, the poet of the Middle Comedy. He naturally received instruction in dramatic writing from his famous uncle, and he is also reported to have studied under the Peripatetic philosopher and scientist Theophrastus, the successor of Aristotle in the Lyceum. A far greater philosopher, Epicurus, was a friend of Menander's boyhood. The dramatist apparently was good-looking, wealthy, and of a good family, and we are informed that he was exceptionally fond of women. He wrote more than one hundred plays, but was victorious only eight times. He is reported to have met his death by drowning, in the year 292. After his death his fame was enormous, and only Homer in Greek literature and Virgil in Roman could claim greater renown. In spite of this, however, the modern world was not bequeathed any of his plays, and had to wait until the latter part of the nineteenth century to form any adequate estimate of his genius. Almost all that we have of his work has been recovered from papyri found in the rubbish-heaps of Oxyrhynchus, a town in Roman Egypt.

If we have just familiarized ourselves with the earlier comedies of Aristophanes and then read those of Menander we find it almost impossible to believe that the New Comedy is the lineal descendant of the Old and that but a single century separates the two. In form and in spirit, in style and in contents, the difference between them is so enormous that we are apt to forget that they must not be evaluated comparatively. There is nothing Aristophanic about Menander, and if we expect to find any such thing we are bitterly disappointed. It is easy to judge Menander unfairly and to fail to realize that in his own way he is very nearly as great as his incredible predecessor. We must not look for brilliant insouciance; what we find is almost the opposite, for the essential feature of Menander's genius is careful dexterity. His comedies are constructed with consummate skill, and in spite of the great complication of their plots they never lack clarity and unity. No detail is too mean to receive devoted attention, and the results are comedies in which there seems never to be a word too few or too many. The motivations are always sound and reasonable, and the characterizations are just detailed enough to be convincing. Yet this flawless performance is executed with such ease and such deftness that we at first tend to undervalue the dramatist's

achievement because we are unaware of the labour that it must have cost him.

Such dramaturgical perfection requires a style that is equally perfect and apparently just as effortless. This Menander had, and his command of language was such that the later centuries of the ancient world made collections of epigrammatical maxims from his plays. Many of these have come down to us, and it is interesting to note that frequently they are quite without value for what they say, but over and over again we meet "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." In the plays that we have, such apophthegms are far from numerous, and there is no reason to believe that Menander ever went out of his way to write very many of them, but whenever they were dramatically appropriate his marvellous style phrased them for all time. It is a style eminently flexible and adaptable, always exactly adequate to whatever demands may be made on it. Normally it is plain and simple, in keeping with the ideal of the persons about whom and for whom Menander wrote, but it can be pathetic and emotional or sparkling and clever, as the dramatic occasion may require.

Whatever its mood, Menander's style is always clear, and his passion for clarity may be the principal reason why his plays are never poetic, even though they are always composed in verse. It is a verse that scans and no more; otherwise it might just as well be prose. Yet we can but seldom observe any traces of the restraints which even so free a verse as the comic trimeter must have imposed. The order of the words is the normal one of prose, and the dramatist never uses any forms or phrases that were foreign to the speech of cultured Athenians in the late fourth century.

With respect to the contents of their plays the dramatists of the New Comedy operated in a narrow field. Their plots exhibit an astonishing repetition of stereotyped motifs, and one is tempted to wonder why the Athenian audiences did not grow weary of young men in love with putative slave-girls who turn out to be foundlings of citizen extraction, and hence may marry the young men after all, in spite of the opposition of parents and the intrigues of slaves. But such things are merely the frame within which the refined and fertile inventive genius of the playwright exercised itself. In this department of the dramatic art Menander seems to have been supreme.

Such are some of the perfections of Menander's genius. If they constituted his sole merits he might command our boundless admiration, but he could not excite our love. In trying to explain why he is able to do this also we have first to get rid of a difficult prejudice. The choice of the term comedy to designate Menander's plays is unfortunate in the extreme, for there is nothing really funny about them. The plots most

closely resemble those of Euripidean tragedies such as *Alcestis* and *Helen*. The characters find themselves in a complicated and unpleasant situation which for a while seems destined to grow steadily worse, but the story is so manipulated that everything works out well in the end and everyone is left happy and contented. We know that this is going to be the ultimate result, yet we do not laugh at the temporary misfortunes of the characters; they elicit too much of our sympathy for that.

There is furthermore nothing "comic" about the language which is put into the mouths of the characters. An occasional amusing remark cannot impugn the validity of the statement that the dialogue of the Menandrian comedy is not funny and is not meant to be. Little or no real obscenity is found in these plays, and anything resembling the extravagant and fanciful wit of Aristophanes is quite unknown. Contemporary persons are never lampooned, and contemporary events, such as acts of war, figure only as remote causes of misfortunes. What we smile at in reading Menander is a varied panorama of human weakness and charm, exposed in the reactions of his characters to the situations in which they find themselves and above all in their dealings with one another. We smile at this gently and happily, because Menander is always kind, always sympathetic, and always tolerant. His material is much the same as that of the satirist, but his approach is different and our response differs accordingly. To be successful in such a medium as the New Comedy the artist must not only know the human heart thoroughly, but also love it devotedly. No one in the ancient world seems to have possessed these qualifications as abundantly as Menander.

E. O'N., Jr.

THE PLAYS OF AESCHYLUS

Characters in the Play

Danaus
The King of Argos
Herald of Aegyptus
Chorus of the Daughters of Danaus
Attendants

INTRODUCTION

AN ANCIENT legend which records at its beginning the wanderings and sufferings of Io provided Aeschylus with the material out of which he constructed *The Suppliants*. In remote prehistoric times, so the legend ran, Zeus fell in love with Io, priestess of Hera, a daughter of Inachus, the king of Argos. Io, though endeavouring to avoid the advances of Zeus, was punished through Hera's jealousy. She was transformed partly into a heifer and made to wander in a half-crazed state over the world until at last she came to the land of Egypt. There, through a mysterious and essentially mystical union with Zeus, the touch of his hand, her transformation was ended, and she conceived a child, Epaphus. Epaphus became the father of Libya, who in turn bore two sons, Belus and Agenor. From Belus sprang two sons, Aegyptus and Danaus. Now Aegyptus had fifty sons and Danaus fifty daughters. Serious conflict arose between the two brothers, for the daughters of Danaus rejected the proposals of marriage proffered by the sons of Aegyptus. In stark terror of the violent lust of their cousins, the maidens with their father fled for asylum to Argos, to the home of their cherished ancestress, Io, there to seek the protection of the gods and of Pelasgus, the king.

Here the action of *The Suppliants* begins. The maidens gain the protection of the king who refuses to turn them over to the sons of Aegyptus, who have followed them in haste to Argos. The emissary of the suitors withdraws from the scene after having made it clear that war is impending, for the sons of Aegyptus have determined to take the maidens by force. The play ends at this point and clearly looks forward to subsequent events in the action. It seems evident, therefore, that *The Suppliants* is the first play of a tragic trilogy, the second and third plays of which are now lost, but whose titles were probably *The Egyptians* and *The Daughters of Danaus*. So far as we can reconstruct Aeschylus' treatment of the remainder of the story, we know that the sons of Aegyptus gained possession of the maidens, and compelled them to marry. Danaus yielded his consent, though secretly commanding his daughters to kill their husbands on their wedding night. All obeyed save one, Hypermnestra, whom the Roman poet, Horace, in the eleventh ode of his third book, described

with his brilliant phrase, *splendide mendax*. She alone spared her husband, Lynceus, because she loved him. At the end of the trilogy she was brought to trial but was successfully defended by Aphrodite, on the ground that love is a power which must be sanctioned because of its omnipresence in the universe.

The Suppliants seems to be an early work of the poet, and it is usually considered the first extant drama in Western European literature. The generally accepted date for its composition is approximately 492 B.C. Its dramatic structure is relatively simple since a large portion of the play is devoted to lyrics sung by the Chorus. Such action as there is seems to be reduced to an absolute minimum, for only on occasion does it demand even a second actor. The fact that the Chorus serves collectively as the protagonist contributes to the structural simplicity of the play.

Many general meanings have been found in *The Suppliants* by various critics. These range from mystical religious interpretations to theories which insist that the play contains a magnificent defence of romantic love, that the Danaids resist and ultimately slay their suitors on the ground that a loveless union between man and woman is unholy. The mystical interpretation derives from the effort to attach special and symbolic significance to the relation between Io and Zeus, and to see further symbolism in the antagonism between the sons of Aegyptus and the Danaids. However valid these theories may be, Aeschylus advances at least two ideas with great clarity. First, there is the notion that the gods are friends and protectors of suppliants, people who are sorely pressed by the vicissitudes of life. This is indeed the theme sounded in the opening lines of the play, where the Chorus prays,

> Zeus! Lord and guard of suppliant hands!
> Look down on us who crave
> Thine aid—

Secondly, underlying the whole play is an enlightened, and in a sense, an unanthropomorphic conception of Zeus, a conception of a godhead which foreshadows the mature and fully wrought theology of the *Oresteia*. In *The Suppliants* the notion is unformed and scarcely explicit, but it seems to be most notably apparent in the choral ode on page 26 which begins,

> O King of Kings, among the blest
> Thou highest and thou happiest.

There can be no doubt that at the outset of his poetic activity Aeschylus had before him questions concerning fundamental theological issues.

THE SUPPLIANTS

(SCENE:—*A sacred precinct near the shore in Argos. Several statues of the gods can be seen, as well as a large altar. As the play opens,* DANAUS, *and his fifty daughters, the maidens who compose the* CHORUS, *enter. Their costumes have an oriental richness about them not characteristic of the strictly Greek. They carry also the wands of suppliants. The* CHORUS *is singing.*)

CHORUS

ZEUS! Lord and guard of suppliant hands!
Look down benign on us who crave
Thine aid—whom winds and waters drave
From where, through drifting shifting sands,
Pours Nilus to the wave.
From where the green land, god-possest,
Closes and fronts the Syrian waste,
We flee as exiles, yet unbanned
By murder's sentence from our land;
But—since Aegyptus had decreed
His sons should wed his brother's seed,—
Ourselves we tore from bonds abhorred,
From wedlock not of heart but hand,
Nor brooked to call a kinsman lord!

And Danaus, our sire and guide,
The king of counsel, pond'ring well
The dice of fortune as they fell,
Out of two griefs the kindlier chose,
And bade us fly, with him beside,
Heedless what winds or waves arose,
And o'er the wide sea waters haste,
Until to Argos' shore at last
Our wandering pinnace came—

Argos, the immemorial home
Of her from whom we boast to come—
Io, the ox-horned maiden, whom,
After long wandering, woe, and scathe,
Zeus with a touch, a mystic breath,
Made mother of our name.
Therefore, of all the lands of earth,
On this most gladly step we forth,
And in our hands aloft we bear—
Sole weapon for a suppliant's wear—
The olive-shoot, with wool enwound!
City, and land, and waters wan
Of Inachus, and gods most high,
And ye who, deep beneath the ground,
Bring vengeance weird on mortal man,
Powers of the grave, on you we cry!
And unto Zeus the Saviour, guard
Of mortals' holy purity!
Receive ye us—keep watch and ward
Above the suppliant maiden band!
Chaste be the heart of this your land
Towards the weak! but, ere the throng,
The wanton swarm, from Egypt sprung,
Leap forth upon the silted shore,
Thrust back their swift-rowed bark again,
Repel them, urge them to the main!
And there, 'mid storm and lightning's shine,
And scudding drift and thunder's roar,
Deep death be theirs, in stormy brine!
Before they foully grasp and win
Us, maiden-children of their kin,
And climb the couch by law denied,
And wrong each weak reluctant bride.

strophe 1

And now on her I call,
Mine ancestress, who far on Egypt's shore
A young cow's semblance wore,—
A maiden once, by Hera's malice changed!
And then on him withal,
Who, as amid the flowers the grazing creature ranged,
Was in her by a breath of Zeus conceived;
And, as the hour of birth drew nigh,

By fate fulfilled, unto the light he came;—
And Epaphus for name,
Born from the touch of Zeus, the child received

antistrophe 1

On him, on him I cry,
And him for patron hold—
While in this grassy vale I stand,
Where Io roamed of old!
And here, recounting all her toil and pain,
Signs will I show to those who rule the land
That I am child of hers; and all shall understand,
Hearing the doubtful tale of the dim past made plain.

strophe 2

And, ere the end shall be,
Each man the truth of what I tell shall see.
And if there dwell hard by
One skilled to read from bird-notes augury,
That man, when through his ears shall thrill our tearful wail,
Shall deem he hears the voice, the plaintive tale
Of her, the piteous spouse of Tereus, lord of guile—
Whom the hawk harries yet, the mourning nightingale.

antistrophe 2

She, from her happy home and fair streams scared away,
Wails wild and sad for haunts beloved erewhile.
Yea, and for Itylus—ah, well-a-day!
Slain by her own, his mother's hand,
Maddened by lustful wrong, the deed by Tereus planned!

strophe 3

Like her I wail and wail, in soft Ionian tones,
And as she wastes, even so
Wastes my soft cheek, once ripe with Nilus' suns,
And all my heart dissolves in utter woe.
Sad flowers of grief I cull,
Fleeing from kinsmen's love unmerciful—
Yea, from the clutching hands, the wanton crowd,
I sped across the waves, from Egypt's land of cloud.

antistrophe 3

Gods of the ancient cradle of my race,
Hear me, just gods! With righteous grace
On me, on me look down!

Grant not to youth its heart's unchaste desire,
But, swiftly spurning lust's unholy fire,
Bless only love and willing wedlock's crown!
The war-worn fliers from the battle's wrack
Find refuge at the hallowed altar-side,
The sanctuary divine,—
Ye gods! such refuge unto me provide—
Such sanctuary be mine!

strophe 4

Though the deep will of Zeus be hard to track,
Yet doth it flame and glance,
A beacon in the dark, 'mid clouds of chance
That wrap mankind.

antistrophe 4

Yea, though the counsel fall, undone it shall not lie,
Whate'er be shaped and fixed within Zeus' ruling mind—
Dark as a solemn grove, with sombre leafage shaded,
His paths of purpose wind,
A marvel to man's eye.

strophe 5

Smitten by him, from towering hopes degraded,
Mortals lie low and still:
Tireless and effortless, works forth its will
The arm divine!
God from His holy seat, in calm of unarmed power,
Brings forth the deed, at its appointed hour!

antistrophe 5

Let Him look down on mortal wantonness!
Lo! how the youthful stock of Belus' line
Craves for me, uncontrolled—
With greed and madness bold—
Urged on by passion's shunless stress—
And, cheated, learns too late the prey has 'scaped their hold!

strophe 6

Ah, listen, listen to my grievous tale,
My sorrow's words, my shrill and tearful cries!
Ah woe, ah woe!
Loud with lament the accents rise,
And from my living lips my own sad dirges flow!

refrain 1

O Apian land of hill and dale,
Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign wail—
Have mercy, hear my prayer!
Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear
My woven raiment, and from off my hair
Cast the Sidonian veil!

antistrophe 6

Ah, but if fortune smile, if death be driven away,
Vowed rites, with eager haste, we to the gods will pay!
Alas, alas again!
O whither drift the waves? and who shall loose the pain?

refrain 1

O Apian land of hill and dale,
Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign wail!
Have mercy, hear my prayer!
Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear
My woven raiment, and from off my hair
Cast the Sidonian veil!

strophe 7

The wafting oar, the bark with woven sail,
From which the sea foamed back,
Sped me, unharmed of storms, along the breeze's track—
Be it unblamed of me!
But ah, the end, the end of my emprise!
May He, the Father, with all-seeing eyes,
Grant me that end to see!

refrain 2

Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore
I may escape the forced embrace
Of those proud children of the race
That sacred Io bore.

antistrophe 7

And thou, O maiden-goddess chaste and pure—
Queen of the inner fane,—
Look of thy grace on me, O Artemis,
Thy willing suppliant—thine, thine it is,
Who from the lustful onslaught fled secure,
To grant that I too without stain
The shelter of thy purity may gain!

refrain 2

Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore
I may escape the forced embrace
Of those proud children of the race
That sacred Io bore!

strophe 8

Yet if this may not be,
We, the dark race sun-smitten, we
Will speed with suppliant wands
To Zeus who rules below, with hospitable hands
Who welcomes all the dead from all the lands:
Yea, by our own hands strangled, we will go,
Spurned by Olympian gods, unto the gods below!

refrain 3

Zeus, hear and save!
The searching, poisonous hate, that Io vexed and drave,
Was of a goddess: well I know
The bitter ire, the wrathful woe
Of Hera, queen of heaven—
A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet are driven!

antistrophe 8

Bethink thee, what dispraise
Of Zeus himself mankind will raise,
If now he turn his face averted from our cries!
If now, dishonoured and alone,
The ox-horned maiden's race shall be undone,
Children of Epaphus, his own begotten son—
Zeus, listen from on high!—to thee our prayers arise.

refrain 3

Zeus, hear and save!
The searching poisonous hate, that Io vexed and drave,
Was of a goddess: well I know
The bitter ire, the wrathful woe
Of Hera, queen of heaven—
A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet are driven!

(*After the* CHORUS *has finished its song and dance,* DANAUS *comes forward.*)

DANAUS

Children, be wary—wary he with whom
Ye come, your trusty sire and steersman old:
And that same caution hold I here on land,
And bid you hoard my words, inscribing them
On memory's tablets. Lo, I see afar
Dust, voiceless herald of a host, arise;
And hark, within their griding sockets ring
Axles of hurrying wheels! I see approach,
Borne in curved cars, by speeding horses drawn,
A speared and shielded band. The chiefs, perchance,
Of this their land are hitherward intent
To look on us, of whom they yet have heard
By messengers alone. But come who may,
And come he peaceful or in ravening wrath
Spurred on his path, 'twere best, in any case,
Damsels, to cling unto this altar-mound
Made sacred to their gods of festival,—
A shrine is stronger than a tower to save,
A shield that none may cleave. Step swift thereto,
And in your left hands hold with reverence
The white-crowned wands of suppliance, the sign
Beloved of Zeus, compassion's lord, and speak
To those that question you, words meek and low
And piteous, as beseems your stranger state,
Clearly avowing of this flight of yours
The bloodless cause; and on your utterance
See to it well that modesty attend;
From downcast eyes, from brows of pure control,
Let chastity look forth; nor, when ye speak,
Be voluble nor eager—they that dwell
Within this land are sternly swift to chide.
And be your words submissive: heed this well;
For weak ye are, outcasts on stranger lands,
And froward talk beseems not strengthless hands.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O father, warily to us aware
Thy words are spoken, and thy wisdom's hest
My mind shall hoard, with Zeus our sire to aid.

DANAUS

Even so—with gracious aspect let him aid.

LEADER
Fain were I now to seat me by thy side.

DANAUS
Now dally not, but put our thought in act.

LEADER
Zeus, pity our distress, or e'er we die.

DANAUS
If so he will, your toils to joy will turn.

LEADER
Lo, on this shrine, the semblance of a bird.

DANAUS
Zeus' bird of dawn it is; invoke the sign.

LEADER
Thus I invoke the saving rays of morn.

DANAUS
Next, bright Apollo, exiled once from heaven.

LEADER
The exiled god will pity our exile.

DANAUS
Yea, may he pity, giving grace and aid.

LEADER
Whom next invoke I, of these other gods?

DANAUS
Lo, here a trident, symbol of a god.

LEADER
Who gave sea-safety; may he bless on land!

DANAUS
This next is Hermes, carved in Grecian wise.

LEADER
Then let him herald help to freedom won.

DANAUS
Lastly, adore this altar consecrate
To many lesser gods in one; then crouch

On holy ground, a flock of doves that flee,
Scared by no alien hawks, a kin not kind,
Hateful, and fain of love more hateful still.
Foul is the bird that rends another bird,
And foul the men who hale unwilling maids,
From sire unwilling, to the bridal bed.
Never on earth, nor in the lower world,
Shall lewdness such as theirs escape the ban:
There too, if men say right, a God there is
Who upon dead men turns their sin to doom,
To final doom. Take heed, draw hitherward,
That from this hap your safety ye may win.
(*The* KING OF ARGOS *enters, followed by his attendants and soldiers.*)

THE KING OF ARGOS

Speak—of what land are ye? No Grecian band
Is this to whom I speak, with Eastern robes
And wrappings richly dight: no Argive maid,
No woman in all Greece such garb doth wear.
This too gives marvel, how unto this land,
Unheralded, unfriended, without guide,
And without fear, ye came? yet wands I see,
True sign of suppliance, by you laid down
On shrines of these our gods of festival.
No land but Greece can rede such signs aright.
Much else there is, conjecture well might guess,
But let words teach the man who stands to hear.

LEADER

True is the word thou spakest of my garb;
But speak I unto thee as citizen,
Or Hermes' wandbearer, or chieftain king?

THE KING OF ARGOS

For that, take heart and answer without fear.
I am Pelasgus, ruler of this land,
Child of Palaichthon, whom the earth brought forth;
And, rightly named from me, the race who reap
This country's harvests are Pelasgian called.
And o'er the wide and westward-stretching land,
Through which the lucent wave of Strymon flows,
I rule; Perrhaebia's land my boundary is
Northward, and Pindus' further slopes, that watch

Paeonia, and Dodona's mountain ridge.
West, east, the limit of the washing seas
Restrains my rule—the interspace is mine.
But this whereon we stand is Apian land,
Styled so of old from the great healer's name;
For Apis, coming from Naupactus' shore
Beyond the strait, child of Apollo's self
And like him seer and healer, cleansed this land
From man-devouring monsters, whom the earth,
Stained with pollution of old bloodshedding,
Brought forth in malice, beasts of ravening jaws,
A grisly throng of serpents manifold.
And healings of their hurt, by knife and charm,
Apis devised, unblamed of Argive men,
And in their prayers found honour, for reward.
—Lo, thou hast heard the tokens that I give:
Speak now thy race, and tell a forthright tale;
In sooth, this people loves not many words.

LEADER

Short is my word and clear. Of Argive race
We come, from her, the ox-horned maiden who
Erst bare the sacred child. My word shall give
Whate'er can stablish this my soothfast tale.

THE KING OF ARGOS

O stranger maids, I may not trust this word,
That ye have share in this our Argive race.
No likeness of our country do ye bear,
But semblance as of Libyan womankind.
Even such a stock by Nilus' banks might grow;
Yea, and the Cyprian stamp, in female forms,
Shows, to the life, what males impressed the same.
And, furthermore, of roving Indian maids
Whose camping-grounds by Aethiopia lie,
And camels burdened even as mules, and bearing
Riders, as horses bear, mine ears have heard;
And tales of flesh-devouring mateless maids
Called Amazons: to these, if bows ye bare,
I most had deemed you like. Speak further yet,
That of your Argive birth the truth I learn.

LEADER

Here in this Argive land—so runs the tale—
Io was priestess once of Hera's fane.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Yea, truth it is, and far this word prevails:
Is't said that Zeus with mortal mingled love?

LEADER

Ay, and that Hera that embrace surmised.

THE KING OF ARGOS

How issued then this strife of those on high?

LEADER

By Hera's will, a heifer she became.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Held Zeus aloof then from the hornèd beast?

LEADER

'Tis said, he loved, in semblance of a bull.

THE KING OF ARGOS

And his stern consort, did she aught thereon?

LEADER

One myriad-eyed she set, the heifer's guard.

THE KING OF ARGOS

How namest thou this herdsman many-eyed?

LEADER

Argus, the child of Earth, whom Hermes slew.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Still did the goddess vex the beast ill-starred?

LEADER

She wrought a gadfly with a goading sting.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Thus drave she Io hence, to roam afar?

LEADER

Yea—this thy word coheres exact with mine.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Then to Canopus and to Memphis came she?

LEADER
And by Zeus' hand was touched, and bare a child.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Who vaunts him the Zeus-mated creature's son?

LEADER
Epaphus, named rightly from the saving touch.

THE KING OF ARGOS
And whom in turn did Epaphus beget?

LEADER
Libya, with name of a wide land endowed.

THE KING OF ARGOS
And who from her was born unto the race?

LEADER
Belus: from him two sons, my father one.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Speak now to me his name, this greybeard wise.

LEADER
Danaus; his brother fifty sons begat.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Grudge not, in telling, his name too to tell.

LEADER
Aegyptus: thou my lineage old hast heard—
Strive then to aid a kindred Argive band.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Yea of a truth, in backward scope of time,
Of Argive race ye seem: but say what chance
Fell on you, goading you from home and land?

LEADER
Lord of Pelasgian men, calamity
Is manifold and diverse; as of birds
Feather from feather differs, so of men
The woes are sundry. Who had dared foretell

That this our sudden flight, this hate and fear
Of loathly wedlock, would on Argos' shore
Set forth a race of kindred lineage?

THE KING OF ARGOS

What crave ye of these gods of festival,
Holding up newly-plucked white-tufted boughs?

LEADER

Ne'er to be slaves unto Aegyptus' race.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Doth your own hate, or doth the law forbid?

LEADER

Not as our lords, but as unloved, we chide them.

THE KING OF ARGOS

'Tis from such wedlock that advancement comes.

LEADER

How easy is it, from the weak to turn!

THE KING OF ARGOS

How then toward you can I be conscience-clear?

LEADER

Deny us, though Aegyptus' race demand.

THE KING OF ARGOS

A heavy task thou namest, a rash war.

LEADER

But Justice champions them who strike for her.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Yea, if their side was from the outset hers.

LEADER

Revere the gods thus crowned, who steer the State.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Awe thrills me, seeing these shrines with leafage crowned.

(*The whole* CHORUS *now sings its responses to the* KING.)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Yea, stern the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants' lord.
Child of Palaichthon, royal chief
Of thy Pelasgians, hear!
Bow down thine heart to my relief—
A fugitive, a suppliant, swift with fear,
A creature whom the wild wolves chase
O'er toppling crags; in piteous case
Aloud, afar she lows,
Calling the herdsman's trusty arm to save her from her foes!

THE KING OF ARGOS

Lo, with bowed heads beside our city shrines
Ye sit 'neath shade of new-plucked olive-boughs.
Our distant kin's resentment Heaven forefend!
Let not this hap, unhoped and unforeseen,
Bring war on us: for strife we covet not.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Justice, the daughter of right-dealing Zeus,
Justice, the queen of suppliants, look down,
That this our plight no ill may loose
Upon your town!
This word, even from the young, let age and wisdom learn:
If thou to suppliants show grace,
Thou shalt not lack Heaven's grace in turn,
So long as virtue's gifts on heavenly shrines have place.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Not at my private hearth ye sit and sue;
And if the city bear a common stain,
Be it the common toil to cleanse the same:
Therefore no pledge, no promise will I give,
Ere counsel with the commonwealth be held.[1]

CHORUS

strophe 2

Nay, but the source of sway, the city's self, art thou,
A power unjudged! thine, only thine,
To rule the right of hearth and shrine!
Before thy throne and sceptre all men bow!
Thou, in all causes lord, beware the curse divine!

THE KING OF ARGOS

May that curse fall upon mine enemies!
I cannot aid you without risk of scathe,
Nor scorn your prayers—unmerciful it were.
Perplexed, distraught I stand, and fear alike
The twofold chance, to do or not to do.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Have heed of him who looketh from on high,
The guard of woeful mortals, whosoe'er
Unto their fellows cry,
And find no pity, find no justice there.
Abiding in his wrath, the suppliants' lord
Doth smite, unmoved by cries, unbent by prayerful word.

THE KING OF ARGOS

But if Aegyptus' children grasp you here,
Claiming, their country's right, to hold you theirs
As next of kin, who dares to counter this?
Plead ye your country's laws, if plead ye may,
That upon you they lay no lawful hand.

CHORUS

strophe 3

Let me not fall, O nevermore,
A prey into the young men's hand;
Rather than wed whom I abhor,
By pilot-stars I flee this land;
O king, take justice to thy side,
And with the righteous powers decide!

THE KING OF ARGOS

Hard is the cause—make me not judge thereof.
Already I have vowed it, to do nought
Save after counsel with my people ta'en,
King though I be; that ne'er in after time,
If ill fate chance, my people then may say—
In aid of strangers thou the State hast slain.

CHORUS

antistrophe 3

Zeus, lord of kinship, rules at will
The swaying balance, and surveys
Evil and good; to men of ill

Gives evil, and to good men praise.
And thou—since true those scales do sway—
Shalt thou from justice shrink away?

THE KING OF ARGOS

A deep, a saving counsel here there needs—
An eye that like a diver to the depth
Of dark perplexity can pass and see,
Undizzied, unconfused. First must we care
That to the State and to ourselves this thing
Shall bring no ruin; next, that wrangling hands
Shall grasp you not as prey, nor we ourselves
Betray you thus embracing sacred shrines,
Nor make the avenging all-destroying god,
Who not in hell itself sets dead men free,
A grievous inmate, an abiding bane.
—Spake I not right, of saving counsel's need?

CHORUS

strophe 4

Yea, counsel take and stand to aid
At Justice' side and mine.
Betray not me, the timorous maid
Whom far beyond the brine
A godless violence cast forth forlorn.

antistrophe 4

O King, wilt thou behold—
Lord of this land, wilt thou behold me torn
From altars manifold?
Bethink thee of the young men's wrath and lust,
Hold off their evil pride;

strophe 5

Steel not thyself to see the suppliant thrust
From hallowed statues' side,
Haled by the frontlet on my forehead bound,
As steeds are led, and drawn
By hands that drag from shrine and altar-mound
My vesture's fringèd lawn.

antistrophe 5

Know thou that whether for Aegyptus' race
Thou dost their wish fulfil,
Or for the gods and for each holy place—

Be thy choice good or ill,
Blow is with blow requited, grace with grace.
Such is Zeus' righteous will.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Yea, I have pondered: from the sea of doubt
Here drives at length the bark of thought ashore;
Landward with screw and windlass haled, and firm,
Clamped to her props, she lies. The need is stern;
With men or gods a mighty strife we strive
Perforce, and either hap in grief concludes.
For, if a house be sacked, new wealth for old
Not hard it is to win—if Zeus the lord
Of treasure favour—more than quits the loss,
Enough to pile the store of wealth full high;
Or if a tongue shoot forth untimely speech,
Bitter and strong to goad a man to wrath,
Soft words there be to soothe that wrath away:
But what device shall make the war of kin
Bloodless? that woe, the blood of many beasts,
And victims manifold to many gods,
Alone can cure. Right glad I were to shun
This strife, and am more fain of ignorance
Than of the wisdom of a woe endured.
The gods send better than my soul foretells!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Of many cries for mercy, hear the end.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Say on, then, for it shall not 'scape mine ear.

LEADER

Girdles we have, and bands that bind our robes.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Even so; such things beseem a woman's wear.

LEADER

Know, then, with these a fair device there is—

THE KING OF ARGOS

Speak, then: what utterance doth this foretell?

LEADER

Unless to us thou givest pledge secure—

THE KING OF ARGOS
What can thy girdles' craft achieve for thee?

LEADER
Strange votive tablets shall these statues deck.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Mysterious thy resolve—avow it clear.

LEADER
Swiftly to hang me on these sculptured gods!

THE KING OF ARGOS
Thy word is as a lash to urge my heart.

LEADER
Thou seest truth, for I have cleared thine eyes.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Yea, and woes manifold, invincible,
A crowd of ills, sweep on me torrent-like.
My bark goes forth upon a sea of troubles
Unfathomed, ill to traverse, harbourless.
For if my deed shall match not your demand,
Dire, beyond shot of speech, shall be the bane
Your death's pollution leaves unto this land.
Yet if against your kin, Aegyptus' race,
Before our gates I front the doom of war,
Will not the city's loss be sore? Shall men
For women's sake incarnadine the ground?
But yet the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants' lord,
I needs must fear: most awful unto man
The terror of his anger. Thou, old man,
The father of these maidens, gather up
Within your arms these wands of suppliance,
And lay them at the altars manifold
Of all our country's gods, that all the town
Know, by this sign, that ye come here to sue.
Nor, in thy haste, do thou say aught of me.
Swift is this folk to censure those who rule;
But, if they see these signs of suppliance,
It well may chance that each will pity you,
And loathe the young men's violent pursuit;
And thus a fairer favour you may find:
For, to the helpless, each man's heart is kind.

DANAUS

To us, beyond gifts manifold it is
To find a champion thus compassionate;
Yet send with me attendants, of thy folk,
Rightly to guide me, that I duly find
Each altar of your city's gods that stands
Before the fane, each dedicated shrine;
And that in safety through the city's ways
I may pass onwards: all unlike to yours
The outward semblance that I wear—the race
That Nilus rears is all dissimilar
To that of Inachus. Keep watch and ward
Lest heedlessness bring death: full oft, I ween,
Friend hath slain friend, not knowing whom he slew.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Go at his side, attendants,—he saith well.
On to the city's consecrated shrines!
Nor be of many words to those ye meet,
The while this suppliant voyager ye lead.
(DANAUS *departs with attendants.*)

LEADER

Let him go forward, thy command obeying.
But me how biddest, how assurest thou?

THE KING OF ARGOS

Leave there the new-plucked boughs, thy sorrow's sign.

LEADER

Thus beckoned forth, at thy behest I leave them.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Now to this level precinct turn thyself.

LEADER

Unconsecrate it is, and cannot shield me.

THE KING OF ARGOS

We will not yield thee to those falcons' greed.

LEADER

What help? more fierce they are than serpents fell.

THE KING OF ARGOS

We spake thee fair—speak thou them fair in turn.

LEADER

What marvel that we loathe them, scared in soul?

THE KING OF ARGOS

Awe towards a king should other fears transcend.

LEADER

Thus speak, thus act, and reassure my mind.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Not long thy sire shall leave thee desolate.
But I will call the country's indwellers,
And with soft words th' assembly will persuade,
And warn your sire what pleadings will avail.
Therefore abide ye, and with prayer entreat
The country's gods to compass your desire;
The while I go, this matter to provide,
Persuasion and fair fortune at my side.
(*The* KING OF ARGOS *departs with his retinue. The* CHORUS *forms to sing its prayer to Zeus.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

O King of Kings, among the blest
Thou highest and thou happiest,
Listen and grant our prayer,
And, deeply loathing, thrust
Away from us the young men's lust,
And deeply drown
In azure waters, down and ever down,
Benches and rowers dark,
The fatal and perfidious bark!

antistrophe 1

Unto the maidens turn thy gracious care;
Think yet again upon the tale of fame,
How from the maiden loved of thee there sprung
Mine ancient line, long since in many a legend sung!
Remember, O remember, thou whose hand
Did Io by a touch to human shape reclaim.
For from this Argos erst our mother came
Driven hence to Egypt's land,
Yet sprung of Zeus we were, and hence our birth we claim.

strophe 2

And now have I roamed back
Unto the ancient track
Where Io roamed and pastured among flowers,
Watched o'er by Argus' eyes,
Through the lush grasses and the meadow bowers.
Thence, by the gadfly maddened, forth she flies
Unto far lands and alien peoples driven
And, following fate, through paths of foam and surge,
Sees, as she goes, the cleaving strait divide
Greece, from the Eastland riven.

antistrophe 2

And swift through Asian borders doth she urge
Her course, o'er Phrygian mountains' sheep-clipt side;
Thence, where the Mysian realm of Teuthras lies,
Towards Lydian lowlands hies,
And o'er Cilician and Pamphylian hills
And ever-flowing rills,
And thence to Aphrodite's fertile shore,
The land of garnered wheat and wealthy store.

strophe 3

And thence, deep-stung by wild unrest,
By the winged fly that goaded her and drave,
Unto the fertile land, the god-possest
(Where, fed from far-off snows,
Life-giving Nilus flows,
Urged on by Typho's strength, a fertilizing wave),
She roves, in harassed and dishonoured flight,
Scathed by the blasting pangs of Hera's dread despite.

antistrophe 3

And they within the land
With terror shook and wanned,
So strange the sight they saw, and were afraid—
A wild twy-natured thing, half heifer and half maid.

Whose hand was laid at last on Io, thus forlorn,
With many roamings worn?
Who bade the harassed maiden's peace return?

strophe 4

Zeus, lord of time eterne.
Yea, by his breath divine, by his unscathing strength,

She lays aside her bane,
And softened back to womanhood at length
Sheds human tears again.
Then, quickened with Zeus' veritable seed,
A progeny she bare,
A stainless babe, a child of heavenly breed.

antistrophe 4

Of life and fortune fair.
His is the life of life—so all men say,—
His is the seed of Zeus.
Who else had power stern Hera's craft to stay,
Her vengeful curse to loose?

Yea, all from Zeus befel!
And rightly wouldst thou tell
That we from Epaphus, his child, were born:
Justly his deed was done;

strophe 5

Unto what other one,
Of all the gods, should I for justice turn?
From him our race did spring;
Creator he and King,
Ancient of days and wisdom he, and might.
As bark before the wind,
So, wafted by his mind,
Moves every counsel, each device aright.

antistrophe 5

Beneath no stronger hand
Holds he a weak command,
No throne doth he abase him to adore;
Swift as a word, his deed
Acts out what stands decreed
In counsels of his heart, for evermore.

(DANAUS *re-enters.*)

DANAUS

Take heart, my children: the land's heart is kind,
And to full issue has their voting come.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

All hail, my sire; thy word brings utmost joy.
Say, to what issue is the vote made sure,
And how prevailed the people's crowding hands?

DANAUS

With one assent the Argives spake their will,
And, hearing, my old heart took youthful cheer.
The very sky was thrilled when high in air
The concourse raised right hands and swore their oath:—
Free shall the maidens sojourn in this land.
Unharried, undespoiled by mortal wight:
No native hand, no hand of foreigner
Shall drag them hence; if any man use force—
Whoe'er of all our countrymen shall fail
To come unto their aid, let him go forth,
Beneath the people's curse, to banishment.
So did the king of this Pelasgian folk
Plead on behalf of us, and bade them heed
That never, in the after-time, this realm
Should feed to fulness the great enmity
Of Zeus, the suppliants' guard, against itself!
A twofold curse, for wronging stranger-guests
Who are akin withal, confrontingly
Should rise before this city and be shown
A ruthless monster, fed on human doom.
Such things the Argive people heard, and straight,
Without proclaim of herald, gave assent:
Yea, in full conclave, the Pelasgian folk
Heard suasive pleas, and Zeus through them resolved.

(*The* CHORUS *now sings a prayer of thankfulness.*)

CHORUS

Arouse we now to chant our prayer
For fair return of service fair
And Argos' kindly will.
Zeus, lord of guestright, look upon
The grace our stranger lips have won.
In right and truth, as they begun,
Guide them, with favouring hand, until
Thou dost their blameless wish fulfil!

strophe 1

Now may the Zeus-born gods on high
Hear us pour forth
A votive prayer for Argos' clan!—
Never may this Pelasgian earth,
Amid the fire-wrack, shrill the dismal cry

On Ares, ravening lord of fight,
Who in an alien harvest mows down man!
For lo, this land had pity on our plight,
And unto us were merciful and leal,
To us, the piteous flock, who at Zeus' altar kneel!

antistrophe 1

They scornèd not the pleas of maidenhood,
Nor with the young men's will hath their will stood.
They knew right well
Th' unearthly watching fiend invincible,
The foul avenger—let him not draw near!
For he, on roofs ill-starred,
Defiling and polluting, keeps a ghastly ward!
They knew his vengeance, and took holy heed
To us, the sister suppliants, who cry
To Zeus, the lord of purity:
Therefore with altars pure they shall the gods revere.
Thus, through the boughs that shade our lips, fly forth in air,

strophe 2

Fly forth, O eager prayer!
May never pestilence efface
This city's race,
Nor be the land with corpses strewed,
Nor stained with civic blood!
The stem of youth, unpluckt, to manhood come,
Nor Ares rise from Aphrodite's bower,
The lord of death and bane, to waste our youthful flower.

antistrophe 2

Long may the old
Crowd to the altars kindled to consume
Gifts rich and manifold—
Offered to win from powers divine
A benison on city and on shrine:
Let all the sacred might adore
Of Zeus most high, the lord
Of guestright and the hospitable board,
Whose immemorial law doth rule Fate's scales aright:
The garners of earth's store
Be full for evermore,
And grace of Artemis make women's travail light;

strophe 3

No devastating curse of fell disease
This city seize;
No clamour of the State arouse to war
Ares, from whom afar
Shrinketh the lute, by whom the dances fail—
Ares, the lord of wail.
Swarm far aloof from Argos' citizens
All plague and pestilence,
And may the Archer-God our children spare!

antistrophe 3

May Zeus with foison and with fruitfulness
The land's each season bless,
And, quickened with Heaven's bounty manifold,
Teem grazing flock and fold.
Beside the altars of Heaven's hallowing
Loud let the minstrels sing,
And from pure lips float forth the harp-led strain in air!

strophe 4

And let the people's voice, the power
That sways the State, in danger's hour
Be wary, wise for all;
Nor honour in dishonour hold,
But—ere the voice of war be bold—
Let them to stranger peoples grant
Fair and unbloody covenant—
Justice and peace withal;

antistrophe 4

And to the Argive powers divine
The sacrifice of laurelled kine,
By rite ancestral, pay.
Among three words of power and awe,
Stands this, the third, the mighty law—
Your gods, your fathers deified,
Ye shall adore. Let this abide
For ever and for aye.

DANAUS

Dear children, well and wisely have ye prayed;
I bid you now not shudder, though ye hear
New and alarming tidings from your sire.
From this high place beside the suppliants' shrine

The bark of our pursuers I behold,
By divers tokens recognized too well.
Lo, the spread canvas and the hides that screen
The gunwale; lo, the prow, with painted eyes
That seem her onward pathway to descry,
Heeding too well the rudder at the stern
That rules her, coming for no friendly end.
And look, the seamen—all too plain their race—
Their dark limbs gleam from out their snow-white garb;
Plain too the other barks, a fleet that comes
All swift to aid the purpose of the first,
That now, with furled sail and with pulse of oars
Which smite the wave together, comes aland.
But ye, be calm, and, schooled not scared by fear,
Confront this chance, be mindful of your trust
In these protecting gods. And I will hence,
And champions who shall plead your cause aright
Will bring unto your side. There come perchance
Heralds or envoys, eager to lay hand
And drag you captive hence; yet fear them not;
Foiled shall they be. Yet well it were for you
(If, ere with aid I come, I tarry long)
Not by one step this sanctuary to leave.
Farewell, fear nought: soon shall the hour be born
When he that scorns the gods shall rue his scorn.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, but I shudder, father!—ah, even now,
Even as I speak, the swift-winged ships draw nigh!

strophe 1

I shudder, I shiver, I perish with fear:
Overseas though I fled,
Yet nought it avails; my pursuers are near!

DANAUS

Children, take heart; they who decreed to aid
Thy cause will arm for battle, well I ween.

CHORUS

But desperate is Aegyptus' ravening race,
With fight unsated; thou too know'st it well.

antistrophe 1

In their wrath they o'ertake us; the prow is deep-dark
In the which they have sped,
And dark is the bench and the crew of the bark!

DANAUS

Yea but a crew as stout they here shall find,
And arms well steeled beneath a noon-day sun.

CHORUS

Ah yet, O father, leave us not forlorn!
Alone, a maid is nought, a strengthless arm.

strophe 2

With guile they pursue me, with counsel malign,
And unholy their soul;
And as ravens they seize me, unheeding the shrine!

DANAUS

Fair will befall us, children, in this chance,
If thus in wrath they wrong the gods and you.

CHORUS

Alas, nor tridents nor the sanctity
Of shrines will drive them, O my sire, from us!

antistrophe 2

Unholy and daring and cursed is their ire,
Nor own they control
Of the gods, but like jackals they glut their desire!

DANAUS

Ay, but *Come wolf, flee jackal,* saith the saw;
Nor can the flax-plant overbear the corn.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lustful, accursèd, monstrous is their will
As of beasts ravening—'ware we of their power!

DANAUS

Look you, not swiftly puts a fleet to sea,
Nor swiftly to its moorings; long it is
Or e'er the saving cables to the shore
Are borne, and long or e'er the steersmen cry,
The good ship swings at anchor—all is well.
Longest of all, the task to come aland

Where haven there is none, when sunset fades
In night. *To pilot wise,* the adage saith,
Night is a day of wakefulness and pain.
Therefore no force of weaponed men, as yet,
Scatheless can come ashore, before the bark
Lie at her anchorage securely moored.
Bethink thee therefore, nor in panic leave
The shrine of gods whose succour thou hast won.
I go for aid—men shall not blame me long,
Old, but with youth at heart and on my tongue.
(DANAUS *departs as the* CHORUS *sings in terror.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

O land of hill and dale, O holy land,
What shall befall us? whither shall we flee,
From Apian land to some dark lair of earth?

O would that in vapour of smoke I might rise to the clouds of the sky,
That as dust which flits up without wings I might pass and evanish and die!

antistrophe 1

I dare not, I dare not abide: my heart yearns, eager to fly;
And dark is the cast of my thought; I shudder and tremble for fear.
My father looked forth and beheld: I die of the sight that draws near.
And for me be the strangling cord, the halter made ready by Fate,
Before to my body draws nigh the man of my horror and hate.
Nay, ere I will own him as lord, as handmaid to Hades I go!

strophe 2

And oh, that aloft in the sky, where the dark clouds are frozen to snow,
A refuge for me might be found, or a mountain-top smooth and too high
For the foot of the goat, where the vulture sits lonely, and none may descry
The pinnacle veiled in the cloud, the highest and sheerest of all,
Ere to wedlock that rendeth my heart, and love that is loveless, I fall!

antistrophe 2

Yea, a prey to the dogs and the birds of the mount will I give me to be,—
From wailing and curse and pollution it is death, only death, sets me free:
Let death come upon me before to the ravisher's bed I am thrust;
What champion, what saviour but death can I find, or what refuge from lust?

strophe 3

I will utter my shriek of entreaty, a prayer that shrills up to the sky,
That calleth the gods to compassion, a tuneful, a pitiful cry,
That is loud to invoke the releaser. O father, look down on the fight;
Look down in thy wrath on the wronger, with eyes that are eager for right.
Zeus, thou that art lord of the world, whose kingdom is strong over all,
Have mercy on us! At thine altar for refuge and safety we call.

antistrophe 3

For the race of Aegyptus is fierce, with greed and with malice afire;
They cry as the questing hounds, they sweep with the speed of desire.
But thine is the balance of fate, thou rulest the wavering scale,
And without thee no mortal emprise shall have strength to achieve or prevail.

(*The* CHORUS *rushes to the altar during the final part of the song.*)

Alack, alack! the ravisher—[2]
He leaps from boat to beach, he draweth near!
Away, thou plunderer accurst!
Death seize thee first,
Or e'er thou touch me—off! God, hear our cry,
Our maiden agony!
Ah, ah, the touch, the prelude of my shame.
Alas, my maiden fame!
O sister, sister, to the altar cling,
For he that seizeth me,
Grim is his wrath and stern, by land as on the sea.
Guard us, O king!

(*The* HERALD OF AEGYPTUS *enters with attendants. The lines in the following scene between the* HERALD *and the* CHORUS *are sung and are accompanied by a frenzied symbolic dance.*)

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Hence to my barge—step swiftly, tarry not.

CHORUS

Alack, he rends—he rends my hair! O wound on wound!
Help! my lopped head will fall, my blood gush o'er the ground!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Aboard, ye cursèd—with a new curse, go!

CHORUS

Would God that on the wand'ring brine
Thou and this braggart tongue of thine
Had sunk beneath the main—
Thy mast and planks, made fast in vain!
Thee would I drive aboard once more,
A slayer and a dastard, from the shore!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Be still, thou vain demented soul;
My force thy craving shall control.
Away, aboard! What, clingest to the shrine?
Away! this city's gods I hold not for divine.

CHORUS

Aid me, ye gods, that never, never
I may again behold
The mighty, the life-giving river,
Nilus, the quickener of field and fold!
Alack, O sire, unto the shrine I cling—
Shrine of this land from which mine ancient line did spring!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Shrines, shrines, forsooth!—the ship, the ship be shrine!
Aboard, perforce and will-ye nill-ye, go!
Or e'er from hands of mine
Ye suffer torments worse and blow on blow.

CHORUS

Alack, God grant those hands may strive in vain
With the salt-streaming wave,
When 'gainst the wide-blown blasts thy bark shall strain
To round Sarpedon's cape, the sandbank's treach'rous grave.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Shrill ye and shriek unto what gods ye may,
Ye shall not leap from out Aegyptus' bark,
How bitterly soe'er ye wail your woe.

CHORUS

Alack, alack my wrong!
Stern is thy voice, thy vaunting loud and strong.
Thy sire, the mighty Nilus, drive thee hence,
Turning to death and doom thy greedy violence!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Swift to the vessel of the double prow,
Go quickly! let none linger, else this hand
Ruthless will hale you by your tresses hence.

CHORUS

Alack, O father! from the shrine
Not aid but agony is mine.
As a spider he creeps and he clutches his prey,
And he hales me away.
A spectre of darkness, of darkness. Alas and alas! well-a-day!
O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of the earth, and her child!
Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour and threatenings wild!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Peace! I fear not this country's deities.
They fostered not my childhood nor mine age.

CHORUS

Like a snake that is human he comes, he shudders and crawls to my side:
As an adder that biteth the foot, his clutch on my flesh doth abide.
O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of the earth, and her child!
Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour and threatenings wild!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Swift each unto the ship; repine no more,
Or my hand shall not spare to rend your robe.

CHORUS

O chiefs, O leaders, aid me, or I yield!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Peace! if ye have not ears to hear my words,
Lo, by these tresses must I hale you hence.

CHORUS

Undone we are, O king! all hope is gone.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Ay, kings enow ye shall behold anon,
Aegyptus' sons—Ye shall not want for kings.
(*The* KING OF ARGOS *enters with his retinue.*)

THE KING OF ARGOS

Sirrah, what dost thou? in what arrogance
Darest thou thus insult Pelasgia's realm?

Deemest thou this a woman-hearted town?
Thou art too full of thy barbarian scorn
For us of Grecian blood, and, erring thus,
Thou dost bewray thyself a fool in all!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
Say thou wherein my deeds transgress my right.

THE KING OF ARGOS
First, that thou play'st a stranger's part amiss.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
Wherein? I do but search and claim mine own.

THE KING OF ARGOS
To whom of our guest-champions hast appealed?

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
To Hermes, herald's champion, lord of search.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Yea, to a god—yet dost thou wrong the gods!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
The gods that rule by Nilus I revere.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Hear I aright? our Argive gods are nought?

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
The prey is mine, unless force rend it from me.

THE KING OF ARGOS
At thine own peril touch them—'ware, and soon!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
I hear thy speech, no hospitable word.

THE KING OF ARGOS
I am no host for sacrilegious hands.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
I will go tell this to Aegyptus' sons.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Tell it! my pride will ponder not thy word.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Yet, that I have my message clear to say
(For it behoves that heralds' words be clear,
Be they or ill or good), how art thou named?
By whom despoilèd of this sister-band
Of maidens pass I homeward?—speak and say!
For lo, henceforth in Ares' court we stand,
Who judges not by witness but by war:
No pledge of silver now can bring the cause
To issue: ere this thing end, there must be
Corpse piled on corpse and many lives gasped forth.

THE KING OF ARGOS

What skills it that I tell my name to thee?
Thou and thy mates shall learn it ere the end.
Know that if words unstained by violence
Can change these maidens' choice, then mayest thou,
With full consent of theirs, conduct them hence.
But thus the city with one voice ordained—
No force shall bear away the maiden band.
Firmly this word upon the temple wall
Is by a rivet clenched, and shall abide:
Not upon wax inscribed and delible,
Nor upon parchment sealed and stored away.—
Lo, thou hast heard our free mouths speak their will:
Out from our presence—tarry not, but go!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Methinks we stand on some new edge of war:
Be strength and triumph on the young men's side!

THE KING OF ARGOS

Nay but here also shall ye find young men,
Unsodden with the juices oozed from grain.

(*The* HERALD OF AEGYPTUS *and his followers withdraw.*)

But ye, O maids, with your attendants true,
Pass hence with trust into the fencèd town,
Ringed with a wide confine of guarding towers.
Therein are many dwellings for such guests
As the State honours; there myself am housed
Within a palace neither scant nor strait.
There dwell ye, if ye will to lodge at ease
In halls well-thronged: yet, if your soul prefer,

Tarry secluded in a separate home.
Choose ye and cull, from these our proffered gifts,
Whiche'er is best and sweetest to your will:
And I and all these citizens whose vote
Stands thus decreed, will your protectors be.
Look not to find elsewhere more loyal guard.

CHORUS *(singing)*

O godlike chief, God grant my prayer:
Fair blessings on thy proffers fair,
Lord of Pelasgia's race!
Yet, of thy grace, unto our side
Send thou the man of courage tried,
Of counsel deep and prudent thought,—
Be Danaus to his children brought;
For his it is to guide us well
And warn where it behoves to dwell—
What place shall guard and shelter us
From malice and tongues slanderous:
Swift always are the lips of blame
A stranger-maiden to defame—
But Fortune give us grace!

THE KING OF ARGOS

A stainless fame, a welcome kind
From all this people shall ye find:
Dwell therefore, damsels, loved of us,
Within our walls, as Danaus
Allots to each, in order due,
Her dower of attendants true.
(DANAUS *re-enters. A troop of soldiers accompanies him.*)

DANAUS

High thanks, my children, unto Argos con,
And to this folk, as to Olympian gods,
Give offerings meet of sacrifice and wine;
For saviours are they in good sooth to you.
From me they heard, and bitter was their wrath,
How those your kinsmen strove to work you wrong,
And how of us were thwarted: then to me
This company of spearmen did they grant,
That honoured I might walk, nor unaware
Die by some secret thrust and on this land
Bring down the curse of death, that dieth not.

Such boons they gave me: it behoves me pay
A deeper reverence from a soul sincere.
Ye, to the many words of wariness
Spoken by me your father, add this word,
That, tried by time, our unknown company
Be held for honest: over-swift are tongues
To slander strangers, over-light is speech
To bring pollution on a stranger's name.
Therefore I rede you, bring no shame on me
Now when man's eye beholds your maiden prime.
Lovely is beauty's ripening harvest-field,
But ill to guard; and men and beasts, I wot,
And birds and creeping things make prey of it.
And when the fruit is ripe for love, the voice
Of Aphrodite bruiteth it abroad,
The while she guards the yet unripened growth.
On the fair richness of a maiden's bloom
Each passer looks, o'ercome with strong desire,
With eyes that waft the wistful dart of love.
Then be not such our hap, whose livelong toil
Did make our pinnace plough the mighty main:
Nor bring we shame upon ourselves, and joy
Unto my foes. Behold, a twofold home—
One of the king's and one the people's gift—
Unbought, 'tis yours to hold,—a gracious boon.
Go—but remember ye your sire's behest,
And hold your life less dear than chastity.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The gods above grant that all else be well.
But fear not thou, O sire, lest aught befall
Of ill unto our ripened maidenhood.
So long as Heaven have no new ill devised,
From its chaste path my spirit shall not swerve.
(*The members of the* CHORUS *divide into two groups, to sing the final choral lyric responsively.*[8])

SEMI-CHORUS

strophe 1

Pass and adore ye the Blessed, the gods of the city who dwell
Around Erasinus, the gush of the swift immemorial tide.

SEMI-CHORUS

Chant ye, O maidens; aloud let the praise of Pelasgia swell;
Hymn we no longer the shores where Nilus to ocean doth glide.

SEMI-CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Sing we the bounteous streams that ripple and gush through the city;
Quickening flow they and fertile, the soft new life of the plain.

SEMI-CHORUS

Artemis, maiden most pure, look on us with grace and with pity—
Save us from forced embraces: such love hath no crown but a pain.

SEMI-CHORUS

strophe 2

Yet not in scorn we chant, but in honour of Aphrodite;
She truly and Hera alone have power with Zeus and control.
Holy the deeds of her rite, her craft is secret and mighty,
And high is her honour on earth, and subtle her sway of the soul.

SEMI-CHORUS

Yea, and her child is Desire: in the train of his mother he goeth—
Yea and Persuasion soft-lipped, whom none can deny or repel:
Cometh Harmonia too, on whom Aphrodite bestoweth
The whispering parley, the paths of the rapture that lovers love well.

SEMI-CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Ah, but I tremble and quake lest again they should sail to reclaim!
Alas for the sorrow to come, the blood and the carnage of war.
Ah, by whose will was it done that o'er the wide ocean they came,
Guided by favouring winds, and wafted by sail and by oar?

SEMI-CHORUS

Peace! for what Fate hath ordained will surely not tarry but come;
Wide is the counsel of Zeus, by no man escaped or withstood:
Only I pray that whate'er, in the end, of this wedlock he doom,
We, as many a maiden of old, may win from the ill to the good.

SEMI-CHORUS

strophe 3

Great Zeus, this wedlock turn from me—
Me from the kinsman bridegroom guard!

SEMI-CHORUS

Come what come may, 'tis Fate's decree.

SEMI-CHORUS
Soft is thy word—the doom is hard.

SEMI-CHORUS
Thou know'st not what the Fates provide.

SEMI-CHORUS

antistrophe 3

How should I scan Zeus' mighty will,
The depth of counsel undescried?

SEMI-CHORUS
Pray thou no word of omen ill.

SEMI-CHORUS
What timely warning wouldst thou teach?

SEMI-CHORUS
Beware, nor slight the gods in speech.

SEMI-CHORUS

strophe 4

Zeus, hold from my body the wedlock detested, the bridegroom abhorred!
It was thou, it was thou didst release
Mine ancestress Io from sorrow: thine healing it was that restored,
The touch of thine hand gave her peace.

SEMI-CHORUS

antistrophe 4

Be thy will for the cause of the maidens! of two ills, the lesser I pray—
The exile that leaveth me pure.
May thy justice have heed to my cause, my prayers to thy mercy find way!
For the hands of thy saving are sure.

NOTES FOR THE SUPPLIANTS

THE Greek text of *The Suppliants* is notoriously corrupt. Readers may be referred to the original printing of Morshead's translation and to other texts and translations of the play for details in regard to the textual problems.

1. It is interesting to note the democratic ideas of government which are attributed to the King of Argos.

2. The Greek text of the following lines is unusually uncertain.

3. Editors differ considerably in their assignment of parts in this final choral passage.

II
THE PERSIANS

Characters in the Play

Atossa, *widow of Darius and mother of* Xerxes
Messenger
Ghost of Darius
Xerxes
Chorus of Persian Elders, *who compose the Persian Council of State*

INTRODUCTION

THE PERSIANS enjoys a unique position among the Greek tragedies which we now possess because it is the only play which deals with historical subject matter. It was presented at Athens in 472 B.C., eight years after the victory of the Greeks at Salamis, which it celebrates, and about twenty years after the composition of *The Suppliants*. Aeschylus has chosen for his setting Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire, at the time when news from the battle was being eagerly awaited. When word finally arrives, the poet conveys to the audience the magnitude of Athens' victory by studying how the Persians react to their overwhelming defeat. He presents first the abject despair of Dowager Queen Atossa, wife of the great Darius and mother of the present King, Xerxes, leader of the ill-starred expedition. The ghost of Darius returns, conjured up from the dead, to join in the lamentation, and finally, at the close of the play Xerxes himself appears, broken and desolate.

Aeschylus was faced with a difficult artistic task in dealing with this subject. He had to present a play which would redound to the greater glory of Athens and at the same time maintain itself upon a level appropriate to tragedy. Perhaps in no other place has he given better evidence of the power of his creative imagination than in this play. As has been pointed out,[1] by placing it at Susa, a spot remote in space, he gains a dignity for his piece which is usually brought about in tragedy by remoteness in time. Then further his praise of Athens is generally by indirection. He mentions none of the great Greeks connected with the battle, not even Themistocles, but at the same time he incorporates into his lines dozens of Persian proper names, whose very size and sound are effective for the poet's purpose. Or again, it seems to be more than simply a dramatic device when Atossa asks, in her speech on page 57, to be told where Athens is.

The play is perhaps most remarkable in that it does not exult over the defeated enemy. In fact, it rather builds up a profound and deep human sympathy for the conquered Persians. Aeschylus seems to have been able to lift himself above the limitations of time and space, and to have seen

[1] Cf. G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy*, p. 88.

this historical event in its true perspective. Hence he can bring out the universal implications of the Persian catastrophe, and can point with telling effect to the fall of the great Xerxes who has been relentlessly pursued by the Nemesis which always attends *hybris*, great and overweening pride. The poet's capacity to universalize his subject derives ultimately from the breadth and depth of the theological thinking already manifested in *The Suppliants*. He was therefore able to view particular human situations from the vantage point of one who possessed deep-seated belief in the order and purpose of the universe.

THE PERSIANS

(SCENE:—*Before the Council-Hall of the Persian Kings at Susa. The tomb of Darius the Great is visible. The time is 480 B.C., shortly after the battle of Salamis. The play opens with the* CHORUS OF PERSIAN ELDERS *singing its first choral lyric.*)

CHORUS

WHILE o'er the fields of Greece the embattled troops
Of Persia march with delegated sway,
We o'er their rich and gold-abounding seats
Hold faithful our firm guard; to this high charge
Xerxes, our royal lord, the imperial son
Of great Darius, chose our honour'd age.
But for the king's return, and his arm'd host
Blazing with gold, my soul presaging ill
Swells in my tortured breast: for all her force
Hath Asia sent, and for her youth I sigh.
Nor messenger arrives, nor horseman spurs
With tidings to this seat of Persia's kings.
The gates of Susa and Ecbatana
Pour'd forth their martial trains; and Cissia sees
Her ancient towers forsaken, while her youth,
Some on the bounding steed, the tall bark some
Ascending, some with painful march on foot,
Haste on, to arrange the deep'ning files of war.
Amistres, Artaphernes, and the might
Of great Astaspes, Megabazes bold,
Chieftains of Persia, kings, that, to the power
Of the great king obedient, march with these
Leading their martial thousands; their proud steeds
Prance under them; steel bows and shafts their arms,
Dreadful to see, and terrible in fight,
Deliberate valour breathing in their souls.

Artembares, that in his fiery horse
Delights; Masistres; and Imaeus bold,
Bending with manly strength his stubborn bow;
Pharandaces, and Sosthanes, that drives
With military pomp his rapid steeds.
Others the vast prolific Nile hath sent;
Pegastagon, that from Aegyptus draws
His high birth; Susiscanes; and the chief
That reigns o'er sacred Memphis, great Arsames;
And Ariomardus, that o'er ancient Thebes
Bears the supreme dominion; and with these,
Drawn from their watery marshes, numbers train'd
To the stout oar. Next these the Lycian troops,
Soft sons of luxury; and those that dwell
Amid the inland forests, from the sea
Far distant; these Metragathes commands,
And virtuous Arceus, royal chiefs, that shine
In burnish'd gold, and many a whirling car
Drawn by six generous steeds from Sardis lead,
A glorious and a dreadful spectacle.
And from the foot of Tmolus, sacred mount,
Eager to bind on Greece the servile yoke,
Mardon and Tharybis the massy spear
Grasp with unwearied vigour; the light lance
The Mysians shake. A mingled multitude
Swept from her wide dominions skill'd to draw
The unerring bow, in ships Euphrates sends
From golden Babylon. With falchions arm'd
From all the extent of Asia move the hosts
Obedient to their monarch's stern command.
Thus march'd the flower of Persia, whose loved youth
The world of Asia nourish'd, and with sighs
Laments their absence; many an anxious look
Their wives, their parents send, count the slow days,
And tremble at the long-protracted time.

strophe 1

Already o'er the adverse strand
In arms the monarch's martial squadrons spread;
The threat'ning ruin shakes the land,
And each tall city bows its tower'd head.
Bark bound to bark, their wondrous way
They bridge across the indignant sea;

The narrow Hellespont's vex'd waves disdain,
His proud neck taught to wear the chain.
Now has the peopled Asia's warlike lord,
By land, by sea, with foot, with horse,
Resistless in his rapid course,
O'er all their realms his warring thousands pour'd;
Now his intrepid chiefs surveys,
And glitt'ring like a god his radiant state displays.

antistrophe 1

Fierce as the dragon scaled in gold
Through the deep files he darts his glowing eye;
And pleased their order to behold,
His gorgeous standard blazing to the sky,
Rolls onward his Assyrian car,
Directs the thunder of the war,
Bids the wing'd arrows' iron storm advance
Against the slow and cumbrous lance.
What shall withstand the torrent of his sway
When dreadful o'er the yielding shores
The impetuous tide of battle roars,
And sweeps the weak opposing mounds away?
So Persia, with resistless might,
Rolls her unnumber'd hosts of heroes to the fight.

strophe 2

For when misfortune's fraudful hand
Prepares to pour the vengeance of the sky,
What mortal shall her force withstand?
What rapid speed the impending fury fly?
Gentle at first with flatt'ring smiles
She spreads her soft enchanting wiles,
So to her toils allures her destined prey,
Whence man ne'er breaks unhurt away.
For thus from ancient times the Fates ordain
That Persia's sons should greatly dare,
Unequall'd in the works of war;
Shake with their thund'ring steeds the ensanguined plain,
Dreadful the hostile walls surround,
And lay their rampired towers in ruins on the ground.

antistrophe 2

Taught to behold with fearless eyes
The whitening billows foam beneath the gale,

They bid the naval forests rise,
Mount the slight bark, unfurl the flying sail,
And o'er the angry ocean bear
To distant realms the storm of war.
For this with many a sad and gloomy thought
My tortured breast is fraught:
Ah me! for Persia's absent sons I sigh;
For while in foreign fields they fight,
Our towns exposed to wild affright
An easy prey to the invader lie:
Where, mighty Susa, where thy powers,
To wield the warrior's arms, and guard thy regal towers?

epode

Crush'd beneath the assailing foe
Her golden head must Cissia bend;
While her pale virgins, frantic with despair,
Through all her streets awake the voice of wo;
And flying with their bosoms bare,
Their purfled stoles in anguish rend:
For all her youth in martial pride,
Like bees that, clust'ring round their king,
Their dark imbodied squadrons bring,
Attend their sceptred monarch's side,
And stretch across the watery way
From shore to shore their long array.
The Persian dames, with many a tender fear,
In grief's sad vigils keep the midnight hour;
Shed on the widow'd couch the streaming tear,
And the long absence of their loves deplore.
Each lonely matron feels her pensive breast
Throb with desire, with aching fondness glow,
Since in bright arms her daring warrior dress'd
Left her to languish in her love-lorn wo.

Now, ye grave Persians, that your honour'd seats
Hold in this ancient house, with prudent care
And deep deliberation, so the state
Requires, consult we, pond'ring the event
Of this great war, which our imperial lord,
The mighty Xerxes from Darius sprung,
The stream of whose rich blood flows in our veins,
Leads against Greece; whether his arrowy shower

Shot from the strong-braced bow, or the huge spear
High brandish'd, in the deathful field prevails.
But see, the monarch's mother: like the gods
Her lustre blazes on our eyes: my queen,
Prostrate I fall before her: all advance
With reverence, and in duteous phrase address her.
(ATOSSA *enters with her retinue. The Elders do their obeisance to her.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hail, queen, of Persia's high-zoned dames supreme,
Age-honour'd mother of the potent Xerxes,
Imperial consort of Darius, hail!
The wife, the mother of the Persians' god,
If yet our former glories fade not from us.

ATOSSA

And therefore am I come, leaving my house
That shines with gorgeous ornaments and gold,
Where in past days Darius held with me
His royal residence. With anxious care
My heart is tortured: I will tell you, friends,
My thoughts, not otherwise devoid of fear,
Lest mighty wealth with haughty foot o'erturn
And trample in the dust that happiness,
Which, not unbless'd by Heaven, Darius raised.
For this with double force unquiet thoughts
Past utterance fill my soul; that neither wealth
With all its golden stores, where men are wanting,
Claims reverence; nor the light, that beams from power,
Shines on the man whom wealth disdains to grace.
The golden stores of wealth indeed are ours;
But for the light (such in the house I deem
The presence of its lord) there I have fears.
Advise me then, you whose experienced age
Supports the state of Persia: prudence guides
Your councils, always kind and faithful to me.

LEADER

Speak, royal lady, what thy will, assured
We want no second bidding, where our power
In word or deed waits on our zeal: our hearts
In this with honest duty shall obey thee.

ATOSSA

Oft, since my son hath march'd his mighty host
Against the Ionians, warring to subdue
Their country, have my slumbers been disturb'd
With dreams of dread portent; but most last night,
With marks of plainest proof. I'll tell thee then:
Methought two women stood before my eyes
Gorgeously vested, one in Persian robes
Adorn'd, the other in the Doric garb.
With more than mortal majesty they moved,
Of peerless beauty; sisters too they seem'd,
Though distant each from each they chanced to dwell,
In Greece the one, on the barbaric coast
The other. 'Twixt them soon dissension rose:
My son then hasted to compose their strife,
Soothed them to fair accord, beneath his car
Yokes them, and reins their harness'd necks. The one,
Exulting in her rich array, with pride
Arching her stately neck, obey'd the reins;
The other with indignant fury spurn'd
The car, and dash'd it piecemeal, rent the reins,
And tore the yoke asunder; down my son
Fell from the seat, and instant at his side
His father stands, Darius, at his fall
Impress'd with pity: him when Xerxes saw,
Glowing with grief and shame he rends his robes.
This was the dreadful vision of the night.
When I arose, in the sweet-flowing stream
I bathed my hands, and on the incensed altars
Presenting my oblations to the gods
To avert these ills, an eagle I behold
Fly to the altar of the sun; aghast
I stood, my friends, and speechless; when a hawk
With eager speed runs thither, furious cuffs
The eagle with his wings, and with his talons
Unplumes his head; meantime the imperial bird
Cowers to the blows defenceless. Dreadful this
To me that saw it, and to you that hear.
My son, let conquest crown his arms, would shine
With dazzling glory; but should Fortune frown,
The state indeed presumes not to arraign
His sovereignty; yet how, his honour lost,
How shall he sway the sceptre of this land?

LEADER

We would not, royal lady, sink thy soul
With fear in the excess, nor raise it high
With confidence. Go then, address the gods;
If thou hast seen aught ill, entreat their power
To avert that ill, and perfect ev'ry good
To thee, thy sons, the state, and all thy friends.
Then to the earth, and to the mighty dead
Behooves thee pour libations; gently call
Him that was once thy husband, whom thou saw'st
In visions of the night; entreat his shade
From the deep realms beneath to send to light
Triumph to thee and to thy son; whate'er
Bears other import, to inwrap, to hide it
Close in the covering earth's profoundest gloom.
This, in the presage of my thoughts that flow
Benevolent to thee, have I proposed;
And all, we trust, shall be successful to thee.

ATOSSA

Thy friendly judgment first hath placed these dreams
In a fair light, confirming the event
Benevolent to my son and to my house.
May all the good be ratified! These rites
Shall, at thy bidding, to the powers of heaven,
And to the manes of our friends, be paid
In order meet, when I return; meanwhile
Indulge me, friends, who wish to be inform'd
Where, in what clime, the towers of Athens rise.

LEADER

Far in the west, where sets the imperial sun.

ATOSSA

Yet my son will'd the conquest of this town.

LEADER

May Greece through all her states bend to his power!

ATOSSA

Send they embattled numbers to the field?

LEADER

A force that to the Medes hath wrought much wo.

ATOSSA
Have they sufficient treasures in their houses?

LEADER
Their rich earth yields a copious fount of silver.

ATOSSA
From the strong bow wing they the barbed shaft?

LEADER
They grasp the stout spear, and the massy shield.

ATOSSA
What monarch reigns, whose power commands their ranks?

LEADER
Slaves to no lord, they own no kingly power.[1]

ATOSSA
How can they then resist the invading foe?

LEADER
As to spread havoc through the numerous host,
That round Darius form'd their glitt'ring files.

ATOSSA
Thy words strike deep, and wound the parent's breast
Whose sons are march'd to such a dangerous field.

LEADER
But, if I judge aright, thou soon shalt hear
Each circumstance; for this way, mark him, speeds
A Persian messenger; he bears, be sure,
Tidings of high import, or good or ill.
(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER
Wo to the towns through Asia's peopled realms!
Wo to the land of Persia, once the port
Of boundless wealth, how is thy glorious state
Vanish'd at once, and all thy spreading honours
Fall'n, lost! Ah me! unhappy is his task
That bears unhappy tidings: but constraint
Compels me to relate this tale of wo.
Persians, the whole barbaric host is fall'n.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
O horror, horror! What a baleful train
Of recent ills! Ah, Persians, as he speaks
Of ruin, let your tears stream to the earth.

MESSENGER
It is ev'n so, all ruin; and myself,
Beyond all hope returning, view this light.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
How tedious and oppressive is the weight
Of age, reserved to hear these hopeless ills!

MESSENGER
I speak not from report; but these mine eyes
Beheld the ruin which my tongue would utter.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Wo, wo is me! Then has the iron storm,
That darken'd from the realms of Asia, pour'd
In vain its arrowy shower on sacred Greece.

MESSENGER
In heaps the unhappy dead lie on the strand
Of Salamis, and all the neighbouring shores.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Unhappy friends, sunk, perish'd in the sea;
Their bodies, mid the wreck of shatter'd ships,
Mangled, and rolling on the encumber'd waves!

MESSENGER
Naught did their bows avail, but all the troops
In the first conflict of the ships were lost.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Raise the funereal cry, with dismal notes
Wailing the wretched Persians. Oh, how ill
They plann'd their measures, all their army perish'd!

MESSENGER
O Salamis, how hateful is thy name!
And groans burst from me when I think of Athens.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
How dreadful to her foes! Call to remembrance
How many Persian dames, wedded in vain,
Hath Athens of their noble husbands widow'd?

ATOSSA
Astonied with these ills, my voice thus long
Hath wanted utterance: griefs like these exceed
The power of speech or question: yet ev'n such,
Inflicted by the gods, must mortal man
Constrain'd by hard necessity endure.
But tell me all, without distraction tell me,
All this calamity, though many a groan
Burst from thy labouring heart. Who is not fallen?
What leader must we wail? What sceptred chief
Dying hath left his troops without a lord?

MESSENGER
Xerxes himself lives, and beholds the light.

ATOSSA
That word beams comfort on my house, a ray
That brightens through the melancholy gloom.

MESSENGER
Artembares, the potent chief that led
Ten thousand horse, lies slaughtered on the rocks
Of rough Sileniae. The great Dadaces,
Beneath whose standard march'd a thousand horse,
Pierced by a spear, fell headlong from the ship.
Tenagon, bravest of the Bactrians, lies
Roll'd on the wave-worn beach of Ajax' isle.[2]
Lilaeus, Arsames, Argestes, dash
With violence in death against the rocks
Where nest the silver doves. Arcteus, that dwelt
Near to the fountains of the Egyptian Nile,
Adeues, and Pheresba, and Pharnuchus
Fell from one ship. Matallus, Chrysa's chief,
That led his dark'ning squadrons, thrice ten thousand,
On jet-black steeds, with purple gore distain'd
The yellow of his thick and shaggy beard.
The Magian Arabus, and Artames
From Bactra, mould'ring on the dreary shore
Lie low. Amistris, and Amphistreus there

Grasps his war-wearied spear; there prostrate lies
The illustrious Ariomardus; long his loss
Shall Sardis weep: thy Mysian Sisames,
And Tharybis, that o'er the burden'd deep
Led five times fifty vessels; Lerna gave
The hero birth, and manly grace adorn'd
His pleasing form, but low in death he lies
Unhappy in his fate. Syennesis,
Cilicia's warlike chief, who dared to front
The foremost dangers, singly to the foes
A terror, there too found a glorious death.
These chieftains to my sad remembrance rise,
Relating but a few of many ills.

ATOSSA

This is the height of ill, ah me! and shame
To Persia, grief, and lamentation loud.
But tell me this, afresh renew thy tale:
What was the number of the Grecian fleet,
That in fierce conflict their bold barks should dare
Rush to encounter with the Persian hosts.

MESSENGER

Know then, in numbers the barbaric fleet
Was far superior: in ten squadrons, each
Of thirty ships, Greece plough'd the deep; of these
One held a distant station. Xerxes led
A thousand ships; their number well I know;
Two hundred more, and seven, that swept the seas
With speediest sail: this was their full amount.
And in the engagement seem'd we not secure
Of victory? But unequal fortune sunk
Our scale in fight, discomfiting our host.

ATOSSA

The gods preserve the city of Minerva.

MESSENGER

The walls of Athens are impregnable,
Their firmest bulwarks her heroic sons.

ATOSSA

Which navy first advanced to the attack?
Who led to the onset, tell me; the bold Greeks,
Or, glorying in his numerous fleet, my son?

MESSENGER

Our evil genius, lady, or some god
Hostile to Persia, led to ev'ry ill.
Forth from the troops of Athens came a Greek,
And thus address'd thy son, the imperial Xerxes:—
"Soon as the shades of night descend, the Grecians
Shall quit their station; rushing to their oars
They mean to separate, and in secret flight
Seek safety." At these words, the royal chief,
Little conceiving of the wiles of Greece
And gods averse, to all the naval leaders
Gave his high charge:—"Soon as yon sun shall cease
To dart his radiant beams, and dark'ning night
Ascends the temple of the sky, arrange
In three divisions your well-ordered ships,
And guard each pass, each outlet of the seas:
Others enring around this rocky isle
Of Salamis. Should Greece escape her fate,
And work her way by secret flight, your heads
Shall answer the neglect." This harsh command
He gave, exulting in his mind, nor knew
What Fate design'd. With martial discipline
And prompt obedience, snatching a repast,
Each mariner fix'd well his ready oar.
Soon as the golden sun was set, and night
Advanced, each train'd to ply the dashing oar,
Assumed his seat; in arms each warrior stood,
Troop cheering troop through all the ships of war.
Each to the appointed station steers his course;
And through the night his naval force each chief
Fix'd to secure the passes. Night advanced,
But not by secret flight did Greece attempt
To escape. The morn, all beauteous to behold,
Drawn by white steeds bounds o'er the enlighten'd earth;
At once from ev'ry Greek with glad acclaim
Burst forth the song of war, whose lofty notes
The echo of the island rocks return'd,
Spreading dismay through Persia's hosts, thus fallen
From their high hopes; no flight this solemn strain
Portended, but deliberate valour bent
On daring battle; while the trumpet's sound
Kindled the flames of war. But when their oars
The paean ended, with impetuous force

Dash'd the resounding surges, instant all
Rush'd on in view: in orderly array
The squadron on the right first led, behind
Rode their whole fleet; and now distinct we heard
From ev'ry part this voice of exhortation:—
"Advance, ye sons of Greece, from thraldom save
Your country, save your wives, your children save,
The temples of your gods, the sacred tomb
Where rest your honour'd ancestors; this day
The common cause of all demands your valour."
Meantime from Persia's hosts the deep'ning shout
Answer'd their shout; no time for cold delay;
But ship 'gainst ship its brazen beak impell'd.
First to the charge a Grecian galley rush'd;
Ill the Phoenician bore the rough attack,
Its sculptured prow all shatter'd. Each advanced
Daring an opposite. The deep array
Of Persia at the first sustain'd the encounter;
But their throng'd numbers, in the narrow seas
Confined, want room for action; and, deprived
Of mutual aid, beaks clash with beaks, and each
Breaks all the other's oars: with skill disposed
The Grecian navy circled them around
With fierce assault; and rushing from its height
The inverted vessel sinks: the sea no more
Wears its accustomed aspect, with foul wrecks
And blood disfigured; floating carcasses
Roll on the rocky shores: the poor remains
Of the barbaric armament to flight
Ply every oar inglorious: onward rush
The Greeks amid the ruins of the fleet,
As through a shoal of fish caught in the net,
Spreading destruction: the wide ocean o'er
Wailings are heard, and loud laments, till night
With darkness on her brow brought grateful truce.
Should I recount each circumstance of wo,
Ten times on my unfinished tale the sun
Would set; for be assured that not one day
Could close the ruin of so vast a host.

ATOSSA

Ah, what a boundless sea of wo hath burst
On Persia, and the whole barbaric race!

MESSENGER

These are not half, not half our ills; on these
Came an assemblage of calamities,
That sunk us with a double weight of wo.

ATOSSA

What fortune can be more unfriendly to us
Than this? Say on, what dread calamity
Sunk Persia's host with greater weight of wo.

MESSENGER

Whoe'er of Persia's warriors glow'd in prime
Of vig'rous youth, or felt their generous souls
Expand with courage, or for noble birth
Shone with distinguish'd lustre, or excell'd
In firm and duteous loyalty, all these
Are fall'n, ignobly, miserably fall'n.

ATOSSA

Alas, their ruthless fate, unhappy friends!
But in what manner, tell me, did they perish?

MESSENGER

Full against Salamis an isle arises,[3]
Of small circumference, to the anchor'd bark
Unfaithful; on the promontory's brow,
That overlooks the sea, Pan loves to lead
The dance: to this the monarch sends these chiefs,
That when the Grecians from their shatter'd ships
Should here seek shelter, these might hew them down
An easy conquest, and secure the strand
To their sea-wearied friends; ill judging what
The event: but when the fav'ring god to Greece
Gave the proud glory of this naval fight,
Instant in all their glitt'ring arms they leap'd
From their light ships, and all the island round
Encompass'd, that our bravest stood dismay'd;
While broken rocks, whirl'd with tempestuous force,
And storms of arrows crush'd them; then the Greeks
Rush to the attack at once, and furious spread
The carnage, till each mangled Persian fell.
Deep were the groans of Xerxes when he saw
This havoc; for his seat, a lofty mound
Commanding the wide sea, o'erlook'd his hosts.

With rueful cries he rent his royal robes,
And through his troops embattled on the shore
Gave signal of retreat; then started wild,
And fled disorder'd. To the former ills
These are fresh miseries to awake thy sighs.

ATOSSA

Invidious Fortune, how thy baleful power
Hath sunk the hopes of Persia! Bitter fruit
My son hath tasted from his purposed vengeance
On Athens, famed for arms; the fatal field
Of Marathon, red with barbaric blood,
Sufficed not; that defeat he thought to avenge,
And pull'd this hideous ruin on his head.
But tell me, if thou canst, where didst thou leave
The ships that happily escaped the wreck?

MESSENGER

The poor remains of Persia's scatter'd fleet
Spread ev'ry sail for flight, as the wind drives,
In wild disorder; and on land no less
The ruin'd army; in Boeotia some,
With thirst oppress'd, at Crene's cheerful rills
Were lost; forespent with breathless speed some pass
The fields of Phocis, some the Doric plain,
And near the gulf of Melia, the rich vale
Through which Sperchius rolls his friendly stream.
Achaea thence and the Thessalian state
Received our famish'd train; the greater part
Through thirst and hunger perish'd there, oppress'd
At once by both: but we our painful steps
Held onwards to Magnesia, and the land
Of Macedonia, o'er the ford of Axius,
And Bolbe's sedgy marshes, and the heights
Of steep Pangaeos, to the realms of Thrace.
That night, ere yet the season, breathing frore,
Rush'd winter, and with ice incrusted o'er
The flood of sacred Strymon: such as own'd
No god till now, awe-struck, with many a prayer
Adored the earth and sky. When now the troops
Had ceased their invocations to the gods,
O'er the stream's solid crystal they began
Their march; and we, who took our early way,
Ere the sun darted his warm beams, pass'd safe:

But when his burning orb with fiery rays
Unbound the middle current, down they sunk
Each over other; happiest he who found
The speediest death: the poor remains, that 'scaped,
With pain through Thrace dragg'd on their toilsome march,
A feeble few, and reach'd their native soil;
That Persia sighs through all her states, and mourns
Her dearest youth. This is no feigned tale:
But many of the ills, that burst upon us
In dreadful vengeance, I refrain to utter.

(*The* MESSENGER *withdraws.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O Fortune, heavy with affliction's load,
How hath thy foot crush'd all the Persian race!

ATOSSA

Ah me, what sorrows for our ruin'd host
Oppress my soul! Ye visions of the night
Haunting my dreams, how plainly did you show
These ills!—You set them in too fair a light.
Yet, since your bidding hath in this prevail'd,
First to the gods wish I to pour my prayers,
Then to the mighty dead present my off'rings,
Bringing libations from my house: too late,
I know, to change the past; yet for the future,
If haply better fortune may await it,
Behooves you, on this sad event, to guide
Your friends with faithful counsels. Should my son
Return ere I have finish'd, let your voice
Speak comfort to him; friendly to his house
Attend him, nor let sorrow rise on sorrows.

(ATOSSA *and her retinue go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Awful sovereign of the skies,
When now o'er Persia's numerous host
Thou badest the storm with ruin rise,
All her proud vaunts of glory lost,
Ecbatana's imperial head
By thee was wrapp'd in sorrow's dark'ning shade;
Through Susa's palaces with loud lament,
By their soft hands their veils all rent,

The copious tear the virgins pour,
That trickles their bare bosoms o'er.
From her sweet couch up starts the widow'd bride,
Her lord's loved image rushing on her soul,
Throws the rich ornaments of youth aside,
And gives her griefs to flow without control:
Her griefs not causeless; for the mighty slain
Our melting tears demand, and sorrow-soften'd strain.

antistrophe

Now her wailings wide despair
Pours these exhausted regions o'er:
Xerxes, ill-fated, led the war;
Xerxes, ill-fated, leads no more;
Xerxes sent forth the unwise command,
The crowded ships unpeopled all the land;
That land, o'er which Darius held his reign,
Courting the arts of peace, in vain,
O'er all his grateful realms adored,
The stately Susa's gentle lord.
Black o'er the waves his burden'd vessels sweep,
For Greece elate the warlike squadrons fly;
Now crush'd, and whelm'd beneath the indignant deep
The shatter'd wrecks and lifeless heroes lie:
While, from the arms of Greece escaped, with toil
The unshelter'd monarch roams o'er Thracia's dreary soil.

epode

The first in battle slain
By Cychrea's craggy shore
Through sad constraint, ah me! forsaken lie,
All pale and smear'd with gore:—
Raise high the mournful strain,
And let the voice of anguish pierce the sky:—
Or roll beneath the roaring tide,
By monsters rent of touch abhorr'd;
While through the widow'd mansion echoing wide
Sounds the deep groan, and wails its slaughter'd lord:
Pale with his fears the helpless orphan there
Gives the full stream of plaintive grief to flow;
While age its hoary head in deep despair
Bends, list'ning to the shrieks of wo.
With sacred awe
The Persian law

No more shall Asia's realms revere;
To their lord's hand
At his command,
No more the exacted tribute bear.
Who now falls prostrate at the monarch's throne?
His regal greatness is no more.
Now no restraint the wanton tongue shall own,
Free from the golden curb of power;
For on the rocks, wash'd by the beating flood,
His awe commanding nobles lie in blood.
(ATOSSA *returns, clad in the garb of mourning; she carries offerings for the tomb of Darius.*)

ATOSSA

Whoe'er, my friends, in the rough stream of life
Hath struggled with affliction, thence is taught
That, when the flood begins to swell, the heart
Fondly fears all things; when the fav'ring gale
Of Fortune smooths the current, it expands
With unsuspecting confidence, and deems
That gale shall always breathe. So to my eyes
All things now wear a formidable shape,
And threaten from the gods: my ears are pierced
With sounds far other than of song. Such ills
Dismay my sick'ning soul: hence from my house
Nor glitt'ring car attends me, nor the train
Of wonted state, while I return, and bear
Libations soothing to the father's shade
In the son's cause; delicious milk, that foams
White from the sacred heifer; liquid honey,
Extract of flowers; and from its virgin fount
The running crystal; this pure draught, that flow'd
From the ancient vine, of power to bathe the spirits
In joy; the yellow olive's fragrant fruit,
That glories in its leaves' unfading verdure;
With flowers of various hues, earth's fairest offspring
Inwreathed. But you, my friends, amid these rites
Raise high your solemn warblings, and invoke
Your lord, divine Darius; I meanwhile
Will pour these off'rings to the infernal gods.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Yes, royal lady, Persia's honour'd grace,
To earth's dark chambers pour thy off'rings: we

With choral hymns will supplicate the powers
That guide the dead, to be propitious to us.
And you, that o'er the realms of night extend
Your sacred sway, thee mighty earth, and thee
Hermes; thee chief, tremendous king, whose throne
Awes with supreme dominion, I adjure:
Send, from your gloomy regions, send his shade
Once more to visit this ethereal light;
That he alone, if aught of dread event
He sees yet threat'ning Persia, may disclose
To us poor mortals Fate's extreme decree.

Hears the honour'd godlike king?
These barbaric notes of wo,
Taught in descant sad to ring,
Hears he in the shades below?
Thou, O Earth, and you, that lead
Through your sable realms the dead,
Guide him as he takes his way,
And give him to the ethereal light of day!

Let the illustrious shade arise
Glorious in his radiant state,
More than blazed before our eyes,
Ere sad Susa mourn'd his fate.
Dear he lived, his tomb is dear,
Shrining virtues we revere:
Send then, monarch of the dead,
Such as Darius was, Darius' shade.

He in realm-unpeopling war
Wasted not his subjects' blood,
Godlike in his will to spare,
In his councils wise and good.
Rise then, sovereign lord, to light;
On this mound's sepulchral height
Lift thy sock in saffron died,
And rear thy rich tiara's regal pride!

Great and good, Darius, rise:
Lord of Persia's lord, appear:
Thus involved with thrilling cries
Come, our tale of sorrow hear!

War her Stygian pennons spreads,
Brooding darkness o'er our heads;
For stretch'd along the dreary shore
The flow'r of Asia lies distain'd with gore.

Rise, Darius, awful power;
Long for thee our tears shall flow.
Why thy ruin'd empire o'er
Swells this double flood of wo?
Sweeping o'er the azure tide
Rode thy navy's gallant pride:
Navy now no more, for all
Beneath the whelming wave—

(*While the* CHORUS *sings,* ATOSSA *performs her ritual by the tomb. As the song concludes the* GHOST OF DARIUS *appears from the tomb.*)

GHOST OF DARIUS

Ye faithful Persians, honour'd now in age,
Once the companions of my youth, what ills
Afflict the state? The firm earth groans, it opes,
Disclosing its vast deeps; and near my tomb
I see my wife: this shakes my troubled soul
With fearful apprehensions; yet her off'rings
Pleased I receive. And you around my tomb
Chanting the lofty strain, whose solemn air
Draws forth the dead, with grief-attemper'd notes
Mournfully call me: not with ease the way
Leads to this upper air; and the stern gods,
Prompt to admit, yield not a passage back
But with reluctance: much with them my power
Availing, with no tardy step I come.
Say then, with what new ill doth Persia groan?

CHORUS (*chanting*)

My wonted awe o'ercomes me; in thy presence
I dare not raise my eyes, I dare not speak.

GHOST OF DARIUS

Since from the realms below, by thy sad strains
Adjured, I come, speak; let thy words be brief;
Say whence thy grief, tell me unawed by fear.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
I dread to forge a flattering tale, I dread
To grieve thee with a harsh offensive truth.

GHOST OF DARIUS
Since fear hath chained his tongue, high-honour'd dame,
Once my imperial consort, check thy tears,
Thy griefs, and speak distinctly. Mortal man
Must bear his lot of wo; afflictions rise
Many from sea, many from land, if life
Be haply measured through a lengthen'd course.

ATOSSA
O thou that graced with Fortune's choicest gifts
Surpassing mortals, while thine eye beheld
Yon sun's ethereal rays, livedst like a god
Bless'd amid thy Persians; bless'd I deem thee now
In death, ere sunk in this abyss of ills,
Darius, hear at once our sum of wo;
Ruin through all her states hath crush'd thy Persia.

GHOST OF DARIUS
By pestilence, or faction's furious storms?

ATOSSA
Not so: near Athens perish'd all our troops.

GHOST OF DARIUS
Say, of my sons, which led the forces thither?

ATOSSA
The impetuous Xerxes, thinning all the land.

GHOST OF DARIUS
By sea or land dared he this rash attempt?

ATOSSA
By both: a double front the war presented.

GHOST OF DARIUS
A host so vast what march conducted o'er?

ATOSSA
From shore to shore he bridged the Hellespont.

GHOST OF DARIUS
What! could he chain the mighty Bosphorus?

ATOSSA
Ev'n so, some god assisting his design.

GHOST OF DARIUS
Some god of power to cloud his better sense.

ATOSSA
The event now shows what mischiefs he achieved.

GHOST OF DARIUS
What suffer'd they, for whom your sorrows flow?

ATOSSA
His navy sunk spreads ruin through the camp.

GHOST OF DARIUS
Fell all his host beneath the slaught'ring spear?

ATOSSA
Susa, through all her streets, mourns her lost sons.

GHOST OF DARIUS
How vain the succour, the defence of arms?

ATOSSA
In Bactra age and grief are only left.

GHOST OF DARIUS
Ah, what a train of warlike youth is lost!

ATOSSA
Xerxes, astonished, desolate, alone—

GHOST OF DARIUS
How will this end? Nay, pause not. Is he safe?

ATOSSA
Fled o'er the bridge, that join'd the adverse strands.

GHOST OF DARIUS
And reach'd this shore in safety? Is this true?

ATOSSA
True are thy words, and not to be gainsay'd.

GHOST OF DARIUS
With what a winged course the oracles
Haste their completion! With the lightning's speed

Jove on my son hath hurled his threaten'd vengeance:
Yet I implored the gods that it might fall
In time's late process: but when rashness drives
Impetuous on, the scourge of Heaven upraised
Lashes the Fury forward; hence these ills
Pour headlong on my friends. Not weighing this,
My son, with all the fiery pride of youth,
Hath quickened their arrival, while he hoped
To bind the sacred Hellespont, to hold
The raging Bosphorus, like a slave, in chains,
And dared the advent'rous passage, bridging firm
With links of solid iron his wondrous way,
To lead his numerous host; and swell'd with thoughts
Presumptuous, deem'd, vain mortal! that his power
Should rise above the gods' and Neptune's might.
And was not this the phrensy of the soul?
But much I fear lest all my treasured wealth
Fall to some daring hand an easy prey.

ATOSSA

This from too frequent converse with bad men
The impetuous Xerxes learn'd; these caught his ear
With thy great deeds, as winning for thy sons
Vast riches with thy conquering spear, while he
Tim'rous and slothful, never, save in sport,
Lifted his lance, nor added to the wealth
Won by his noble fathers. This reproach
Oft by bad men repeated, urged his soul
To attempt this war, and lead his troops to Greece.

GHOST OF DARIUS

Great deeds have they achieved, and memorable
For ages: never hath this wasted state
Suffer'd such ruin, since heaven's awful king
Gave to one lord Asia's extended plains
White with innumerous flocks, and to his hands
Consign'd the imperial sceptre. Her brave hosts
A Mede first led; the virtues of his son
Fix'd firm the empire, for his temperate soul
Breathed prudence. Cyrus next, by fortune graced,
Adorn'd the throne, and bless'd his grateful friends
With peace: he to his mighty monarchy
Join'd Lydia, and the Phrygians; to his power
Ionia bent reluctant; but the gods

With victory his gentle virtues crown'd
His son then wore the regal diadem.
Next to disgrace his country, and to stain
The splendid glories of this ancient throne,
Rose Mardus: him, with righteous vengeance fired
Artaphernes, and his confederate chiefs
Crush'd in his palace: Maraphis assumed
The sceptre: after him Artaphernes.
Me next to this exalted eminence,
Crowning my great ambition, Fortune raised.
In many a glorious field my glittering spear
Flamed in the van of Persia's numerous hosts;
But never wrought such ruin to the state.
Xerxes, my son, in all the pride of youth
Listens to youthful counsels, my commands
No more remember'd; hence, my hoary friends,
Not the whole line of Persia's sceptred lords,
You know it well, so wasted her brave sons.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why this? To what fair end are these thy words
Directed? Sovereign lord, instruct thy Persians
How, mid this ruin, best to guide their state.

GHOST OF DARIUS

No more 'gainst Greece lead your embattled hosts;
Not though your deep'ning phalanx spreads the field
Outnumb'ring theirs: their very earth fights for them.

LEADER

What may thy words import? How fight for them?

GHOST OF DARIUS

With famine it destroys your cumbrous train.

LEADER

Choice levies, prompt for action, will we send.

GHOST OF DARIUS

Those, in the fields of Greece that now remain,
Shall not revisit safe the Persian shore.

LEADER

What! shall not all the host of Persia pass
Again from Europe o'er the Hellespont?

GHOST OF DARIUS

Of all their numbers few, if aught avails
The faith of heaven-sent oracles to him
That weighs the past, in their accomplishment
Not partial: hence he left, in faithless hope
Confiding, his selected train of heroes.
These have their station where Asopus flows
Wat'ring the plain, whose grateful currents roll
Diffusing plenty through Boeotia's fields.
There misery waits to crush them with the load
Of heaviest ills, in vengeance for their proud
And impious daring; [4] for where'er they held
Through Greece their march, they fear'd not to profane
The statues of the gods; their hallow'd shrines
Emblazed, o'erturn'd their altars, and in ruins,
Rent from their firm foundations, to the ground
Levell'd their temples; such their frantic deeds,
Nor less their suff'rings; greater still await them;
For Vengeance hath not wasted all her stores;
The heap yet swells; for in Plataea's plains
Beneath the Doric spear the clotted mass
Of carnage shall arise, that the high mounds,
Piled o'er the dead, to late posterity
Shall give this silent record to men's eyes,
That proud aspiring thoughts but ill beseem
Weak mortals: for oppression, when it springs,
Puts forth the blade of vengeance, and its fruit
Yields a ripe harvest of repentant wo.
Behold this vengeance, and remember Greece,
Remember Athens: henceforth let not pride,
Her present state disdaining, strive to grasp
Another's, and her treasured happiness
Shed on the ground: such insolent attempts
Awake the vengeance of offended Jove.
But you, whose age demands more temperate thoughts,
With words of well-placed counsel teach his youth
To curb that pride, which from the gods calls down
Destruction on his head. (*To* ATOSSA) And thou, whose age
The miseries of thy Xerxes sink with sorrow,
Go to thy house, thence choose the richest robe,
And meet thy son; for through the rage of grief
His gorgeous vestments from his royal limbs
Are foully rent. With gentlest courtesy

Soothe his affliction; for his duteous ear,
I know, will listen to thy voice alone.
Now to the realms of darkness I descend.
My ancient friends, farewell, and mid these ills
Each day in pleasures bathe your drooping spirits,
For treasured riches naught avail the dead.
(*The* GHOST OF DARIUS *vanishes into the tomb.*)

LEADER

These many present, many future ills
Denounced on Persia, sink my soul with grief.

ATOSSA

Unhappy fortune, what a tide of ills
Bursts o'er me! Chief this foul disgrace, which shows
My son divested of his rich attire,
His royal robes all rent, distracts my thoughts.
But I will go, choose the most gorgeous vest,
And haste to meet my son. Ne'er in his woes
Will I forsake whom my soul holds most dear.
(ATOSSA *departs as the* CHORUS *begins its song.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Ye powers that rule the skies,
Memory recalls our great, our happy fate,
Our well-appointed state,
The scenes of glory opening to our eyes,
When this vast empire o'er
The good Darius, with each virtue bless'd
That forms a monarch's breast,
Shielding his subjects with a father's care,
Invincible in war,
Extended like a god his awful power,
Then spread our arms their glory wide,
Guarding to peace her golden reign:
Each tower'd city saw with pride
Safe from the toils of war her homeward-marching train.

antistrophe 1

Nor Haly's shallow strand
He pass'd, nor from his palace moved his state;
He spoke; his word was Fate.
What strong-based cities could his might withstand?

Not those that lift their heads
Where to the sea the floods of Strymon pass,
Leaving the huts of Thrace;
Nor those, that far the extended ocean o'er
Stand girt with many a tower;
Nor where the Hellespont his broad wave spreads;
Nor the firm bastions' rampired might,
Whose foot the deep Propontis laves;
Nor those, that glorying in their height
Frown o'er the Pontic sea, and shade his darken'd waves.

strophe 2

Each sea-girt isle around
Bow'd to this monarch: humbled Lesbos bow'd;
Paros, of its marble proud;
Naxos with vines, with olives Samos crown'd:
Him Myconos adored;
Chios, the seat of beauty; Andros steep,
That stretches o'er the deep
To meet the wat'ry Tenos; him each bay
Bound by the Icarian sea,
Him Melos, Gnidus, Rhodes confess'd their lord;
O'er Cyprus stretch'd his sceptred hand:
Paphos and Solos own'd his power,
And Salamis, whose hostile strand,
The cause of all our wo, is red with Persian gore.

antistrophe 2

Ev'n the proud towns, that rear'd
Sublime along the Ionian coast their towers,
Where wealth her treasures pours,
Peopled from Greece, his prudent reign revered.
With such unconquer'd might
His hardy warriors shook the embattled fields,
Heroes that Persia yields,
And those from distant realms that took their way,
And wedged in close array
Beneath his glitt'ring banners claim'd the fight.
But now these glories are no more:
Farewell the big war's plumed pride:
The gods have crush'd this trophied power;
Sunk are our vanquish'd arms beneath the indignant tide.

(XERXES *enters, with a few followers. His royal raiment is torn. The entire closing scene is sung or chanted.*)

XERXES

Ah me, how sudden have the storms of Fate,
Beyond all thought, all apprehension, burst
On my devoted head! O Fortune, Fortune!
With what relentless fury hath thy hand
Hurl'd desolation on the Persian race!
Wo unsupportable! The torturing thought
Of our lost youth comes rushing on my mind,
And sinks me to the ground. O Jove, that I
Had died with those brave men that died in fight!

CHORUS

O thou afflicted monarch, once the lord
Of marshall'd armies, of the lustre beam'd
From glory's ray o'er Persia, of her sons
The pride, the grace, whom ruin now hath sunk
In blood! The unpeopled land laments her youth
By Xerxes led to slaughter, till the realms
Of death are gorged with Persians; for the flower
Of all the realm, thousands, whose dreadful bows
With arrowy shower annoy'd the foe, are fall'n.

XERXES

Your fall, heroic youths, distracts my soul.

CHORUS

And Asia sinking on her knee, O king,
Oppress'd, with griefs oppress'd, bends to the earth.

XERXES

And I, O wretched fortune, I was born
To crush, to desolate my ruin'd country!

CHORUS

I have no voice, no swelling harmony,
No descant, save these notes of wo,
Harsh, and responsive to the sullen sigh,
Rude strains, that unmelodious flow,
To welcome thy return.

XERXES

Then bid them flow, bid the wild measures flow
Hollow, unmusical, the notes of grief;
They suit my fortune, and dejected state.

CHORUS

Yes, at thy royal bidding shall the strain
Pour the deep sorrows of my soul;
The suff'rings of my bleeding country plain,
And bid the mournful measures roll.
Again the voice of wild despair
With thrilling shrieks shall pierce the air;
For high the god of war his flaming crest
Raised, with the fleet of Greece surrounded,
The haughty arms of Greece with conquest bless'd,
And Persia's wither'd force confounded,
Dash'd on the dreary beach her heroes slain,
Or whelm'd them in the darken'd main.

XERXES

To swell thy griefs ask ev'ry circumstance.

CHORUS

Where are thy valiant friends, thy chieftains where?
Pharnaces, Susas, and the might
Of Pelagon, and Dotamas? The spear
Of Agabates bold in fight?
Psammis in mailed cuirass dress'd,
And Susiscanes' glitt'ring crest?

XERXES

Dash'd from the Tyrian vessel on the rocks
Of Salamis they sunk, and smear'd with gore
The heroes on the dreary strand are stretch'd.

CHORUS

Where is Pharnuchus? Ariomardus where,
With ev'ry gentle virtue graced?
Lilaeus, that from chiefs renown'd in war
His high-descended lineage traced?
Where rears Sebalces his crown-circled head:
Where Tharybis to battles bred,
Artembares, Hystaechmes bold,
Memphis, Masistres sheath'd in gold?

XERXES

Wretch that I am! These on the abhorred town
Ogygian Athens, roll'd their glowing eyes
Indignant; but at once in the fierce shock
Of battle fell, dash'd breathless on the ground.

CHORUS

There does the son of Batanochus lie,
Through whose rich veins the unsullied blood
Of Susamus, down from the lineage high
Of noble Mygabatas flow'd:
Alpistus, who with faithful care
Number'd the deep'ning files of war,
The monarch's eye; on the ensanguined plain
Low is the mighty warrior laid?
Is great Aebares 'mong the heroes slain,
And Partheus number'd with the dead?—
Ah me! those bursting groans, deep-charged with wo,
The fate of Persia's princes show.

XERXES

To my grieved memory thy mournful voice,
Tuned to the saddest notes of wo, recalls
My brave friends lost; and my rent heart returns
In dreadful symphony the sorrowing strain.

CHORUS

Yet once more shall I ask thee, yet once more,
Where is the Mardian Xanthes' might,
The daring chief, that from the Pontic shore
Led his strong phalanx to the fight?
Anchares where, whose high-raised shield
Flamed foremost in the embattled field?
Where the high leaders of thy mail-clad horse,
Daixis and Arsaces where?
Where Cigdagatas and Lythimnas' force,
Waving untired his purple spear?

XERXES

Entomb'd, I saw them in the earth entomb'd;
Nor did the rolling car with solemn state
Attend their rites: I follow'd: low they lie
(Ah me, the once great leaders of my host!),
Low in the earth, without their honours lie.

CHORUS

O wo, wo, wo! Unutterable wo
The demons of revenge have spread;
And Ate from her drear abode below
Rises to view the horrid deed.

XERXES

Dismay, and rout, and ruin, ills that wait
On man's afflicted fortune, sink us down.

CHORUS

Dismay, and rout, and ruin on us wait,
And all the vengeful storms of Fate:
Ill flows on ill, on sorrows sorrows rise;
Misfortune leads her baleful train;
Before the Ionian squadrons Persia flies,
Or sinks ingulf'd beneath the main.
Fall'n, fall'n is her imperial power,
And conquest on her banners waits no more.

XERXES

At such a fall, such troops of heroes lost,
How can my soul but sink in deep despair!
Cease thy sad strain.

CHORUS

Is all thy glory lost?

XERXES

Seest thou these poor remains of my rent robes?

CHORUS

I see, I see.

XERXES

And this ill-furnish'd quiver?

CHORUS

Wherefore preserved?

XERXES

To store my treasured arrows.

CHORUS

Few, very few.

XERXES

And few my friendly aids.

CHORUS

I thought these Grecians shrunk appall'd at arms.

XERXES

No: they are bold and daring: these sad eyes
Beheld their violent and deathful deeds.

CHORUS

The ruin, sayst thou, of thy shattered fleet?

XERXES

And in the anguish of my soul I rent
My royal robes.

CHORUS

Wo, wo!

XERXES

And more than wo.

CHORUS

Redoubled, threefold wo!

XERXES

Disgrace to me,
But triumph to the foe.

CHORUS

Are all thy powers
In ruin crush'd?

XERXES

No satrap guards me now.

CHORUS

Thy faithful friends sunk in the roaring main.

XERXES

Weep, weep their loss, and lead me to my house;
Answer my grief with grief, an ill return
Of ills for ills. Yet once more raise that strain
Lamenting my misfortunes; beat thy breast,
Strike, heave the groan; awake the Mysian strain
To notes of loudest wo; rend thy rich robes,
Pluck up thy beard, tear off thy hoary locks,
And bathe thine eyes in tears: thus through the streets
Solemn and slow with sorrow lead my steps;
Lead to my house, and wail the fate of Persia.

CHORUS

Yes, once more at thy bidding shall the strain
  Pour the deep sorrows of my soul;
The suff'rings of my bleeding country plain,
  And bid the Mysian measures roll.
    Again the voice of wild despair
    With thrilling shrieks shall pierce the air;
For high the god of war his flaming crest
  Raised, with the fleet of Greece surrounded,
The haughty arms of Greece with conquest bless'd,
  And Persia's withered force confounded,
Dash'd on the dreary beach her heroes slain,
Or whelm'd them in the darken'd main.

NOTES FOR THE PERSIANS

THE translation of R. Potter was first published in 1777. There are therefore certain outmoded spellings in his text, particularly in the case of the Persian proper names. Potter's divisions of the choral passages into strophe and antistrophe have been maintained.

1. Lines such as this reflect the pride which Athens took in her democratic institutions.

2. The reference is to the island of Salamis, the reputed birthplace of Ajax, son of Telamon.

3. The island is Psyttalea.

4. Darius is foretelling the results of the battle of Plataea in 479 B.C.

III
THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Characters in the Play

Eteocles, *son of Oedipus, King of Thebes*
A Spy
Chorus of Theban Women
Antigone, Ismene } *sisters of* Eteocles
A Herald

INTRODUCTION

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES, presented first in 467 B.C., is the third and only surviving play of a trilogy, which won the first prize in the contest for tragedy in that year. The first and second plays were the *Laïus* and the *Oedipus,* and the three were followed by a satyr-play entitled *The Sphinx.* There is every evidence that the piece was extremely popular in antiquity, even though Aristophanes in his *Frogs,* lines 1021 ff., has made it the butt of some genial satiric thrusts, directed against the highly elevated diction of the play and its military subject matter. Although the play is similar to the *Oresteia* in that it portrays the workings of a curse upon a house, *The Seven Against Thebes* does not achieve the heights reached by the poet in his later masterpiece.

The Theban legend, from which Aeschylus drew his plot, tells how Laius, king of Thebes, disobeyed the oracle of Apollo which warned him that if he begot a child, ruin would fall upon his house and upon his kingdom. A child, Oedipus, was born and the curse began to operate. Though his parents exposed him as an infant on the slopes of Mount Cithaeron, his life was saved by a friendly shepherd. So it happened that he reached manhood, unwittingly slew his father, returned to Thebes where likewise unwittingly he married his mother, Jocasta. Four children were born of this incestuous union, two sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. When finally the truth became known, Jocasta took her own life and Oedipus inflicted blindness on himself. His sons, who were to share the power of Thebes, maltreated their aged and broken father, who before his death pronounced the curse that they should die by each other's hands. Eteocles, who first held the kingly power, would not allow Polyneices to bear sway in his rightful turn, and thrust him in exile from Thebes. As the play begins, Polyneices has brought a supporting host from Argos, and is besieging the city, determined to assert his rights by force.

The play itself, which is simple in structure, delineates first the psychological state of the inhabitants in the besieged city. The maidens of Thebes, who make up the Chorus, at first are terror-stricken, but the king, Eteocles, sharply rebukes them and succeeds in restoring their

morale. The remainder of the drama records the successful defence of the city and the fate of the two brothers. There is a final scene in which Antigone insists on giving due rites of burial to the body of Polyneices, to whom such rites had been denied by a decree of the Theban leaders, on the ground that he had attacked his native city. Many scholars have argued that this scene is a later addition and not from the hand of Aeschylus, since it resembles most closely the *Antigone* of Sophocles which contains a full-length treatment of precisely this theme.

The Seven Against Thebes is significant among the plays of Aeschylus largely because of the characterization of Eteocles. Here for the first time we meet what might be called a "tragic hero." Eteocles is presented as a good and devoted king, loyal to his people and eager to protect them from their enemies. His full nature, however, is brought out in the play in the scene which follows the description of Polyneices as he approaches to attack the city. Eteocles, almost crazed with hatred for his brother, finally goes forth to meet him. He does so, despite the Chorus' efforts to deter him, and with the full knowledge in his heart that both he and his brother will be destroyed by their father's curse. Though Aeschylus in the play does not focus his attention sharply upon the familiar phenomenon of life, that sin or evil-doing possesses the peculiar capacity to reproduce itself even to the third and fourth generations (a phenomenon which the Greeks called a curse upon a house), nevertheless largely through his delineation of Eteocles' character, the poet achieves for his piece the magnitude and scale indispensable to tragedy.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

(SCENE:—*Within the Citadel of Thebes. There is an altar with the statues of several gods visible. A crowd of citizens are present as* ETEOCLES *enters with his attendants.*)

ETEOCLES

CLANSMEN of Cadmus, at the signal given
By time and season must the ruler speak
Who sets the course and steers the ship of State
With hand upon the tiller, and with eye
Watchful against the treachery of sleep.
For if all go aright, *thank Heaven,* men say,
But if adversely—which may God forefend!—
One name on many lips, from street to street,
Would bear the bruit and rumour of the time,
Down with Eteocles!—a clamorous curse,
A dirge of ruin. May averting Zeus
Make good his title here, in Cadmus' hold!
You it beseems now—boys unripened yet
To lusty manhood, men gone past the prime
And increase of the full begetting seed,
And those whom youth and manhood well combined
Array for action—all to rise in aid
Of city, shrines, and altars of all powers
Who guard our land; that ne'er, to end of time,
Be blotted out the sacred service due
To our sweet mother-land and to her brood.
For she it was who to their guest-right called
Your waxing youth, was patient of the toil,
And cherished you on the land's gracious lap,
Alike to plant the hearth and bear the shield
In loyal service, for an hour like this.
Mark now! until to-day, luck rules our scale;

For we, though long beleaguered, in the main
Have with our sallies struck the foemen hard.
But now the seer, the feeder of the birds
(Whose art unerring and prophetic skill
Of ear and mind divines their utterance
Without the lore of fire interpreted)
Foretelleth, by the mastery of his art,
That now an onset of Achaea's host
Is by a council of the night designed
To fall in double strength upon our walls.
Up and away, then, to the battlements,
The gates, the bulwarks! don your panoplies,
Array you at the breast-work, take your stand
On the floorings of the towers, and with good heart
Stand firm for sudden sallies at the gates,
Nor hold too heinous a respect for hordes
Sent on you from afar: some god will guard!
I too, for shrewd espial of their camp,
Have sent forth scouts, and confidence is mine
They will not fail nor tremble at their task,
And, with their news, I fear no foeman's guile.
(*A* Spy *enters.*)

The Spy

Eteocles, high king of Cadmus' folk,
I stand here with news certified and sure
From Argos' camp, things by myself descried.
Seven warriors yonder, doughty chiefs of might,
Into the crimsoned concave of a shield
Have shed a bull's blood, and, with hands immersed
Into the gore of sacrifice, have sworn
By Ares, lord of fight, and by thy name,
Blood-lapping Terror, *Let our oath be heard—*
Either to raze the walls, make void the hold
Of Cadmus—strive his children as they may—
Or, dying here, to make the foemen's land
With blood impasted. Then, as memory's gift
Unto their parents at the far-off home,
Chaplets they hung upon Adrastus' car,
With eyes tear-dropping, but no word of moan.
For their steeled spirit glowed with high resolve,
As lions pant, with battle in their eyes.
For them, no weak alarm delays the clear

Issues of death or life! I parted thence
Even as they cast the lots, how each should lead,
Against which gate, his serried company.
Rank then thy bravest, with what speed thou may'st,
Hard by the gates, to dash on them, for now,
Full-armed, the onward ranks of Argos come!
The dust whirls up, and from their panting steeds
White foamy flakes like snow bedew the plain.
Thou therefore, chieftain! like a steersman skilled,
Enshield the city's bulwarks, ere the blast
Of war comes darting on them! hark, the roar
Of the great landstorm with its waves of men!
Take Fortune by the forelock! for the rest,
By yonder dawn-light will I scan the field
Clear and aright, and surety of my word
Shall keep thee scatheless of the coming storm.

ETEOCLES

O Zeus and Earth and city-guarding gods,
And thou, my father's Curse, of baneful might,
Spare ye at least this town, nor root it up,
By violence of the foemen, stock and stem!
For here, from home and hearth, rings Hellas' tongue.
Forbid that e'er the yoke of slavery
Should bow this land of freedom, Cadmus' hold!
Be ye her help! your cause I plead with mine—
A city saved doth honour to her gods!

(ETEOCLES, *his attendants and most of the crowd go out. The* CHORUS OF THEBAN WOMEN *enters. They appear terror-stricken.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

I wail in the stress of my terror, and shrill is my cry of despair.
The foemen roll forth from their camp as a billow, and onward they bear!
Their horsemen are swift in the forefront, the dust rises up to the sky,
A signal, though speechless, of doom, a herald more clear than a cry!
Hoof-trampled, the land of my love bears onward the din to mine ears.
As a torrent descending a mountain, it thunders and echoes and nears!
The doom is unloosened and cometh! O kings and O queens of high Heaven,
Prevail that it fall not upon us! the sign for their onset is given—
They stream to the walls from without, white-shielded and keen for the fray.

They storm to the citadel gates—what god or what goddess can stay
The rush of their feet? to what shrine shall I bow me in terror and pray?

(*They rush to pray to the gods.*)

O gods high-thronèd in bliss, we must crouch at the shrines in your home!
Not here must we tarry and wail: shield clashes on shield as they come—
And now, even now is the hour for the robes and the chaplets of prayer!
Mine eyes feel the flash of the sword, the clang is instinct with the spear!
Is thy hand set against us, O Ares, in ruin and wrath to o'erwhelm
Thine own immemorial land, O god of the golden helm?
Look down upon us, we beseech thee, on the land that thou lovest of old.

strophe 1

And ye, O protecting gods, in pity your people behold!
Yea, save us, the maidenly troop, from the doom and despair of the slave,
For the crests of the foemen come onward, their rush is the rush of a wave
Rolled on by the War-god's breath! almighty one, hear us and save
From the grasp of the Argives' might! to the ramparts of Cadmus they crowd,
And, clenched in the teeth of the steeds, the bits clink horror aloud!
And seven high chieftains of war, with spear and with panoply bold,
Are set, by the law of the lot, to storm the seven gates of our hold!

antistrophe 1

Be near and befriend us, O Pallas, the Zeus-born maiden of might!
O lord of the steed and the sea, be thy trident uplifted to smite
In eager desire of the fray, Poseidon! and Ares come down,
In fatherly presence revealed, to rescue Harmonia's town!
Thine too, Aphrodite, we are! thou art mother and queen of our race,
To thee we cry out in our need, from thee let thy children have grace!
Ye too, to scare back the foe, be your cry as a wolf's howl wild,
Thou, O the wolf-lord, and thou, of she-wolf Leto the child!

strophe 2

Woe and alack for the sound, for the rattle of cars to the wall,
And the creak of the griding axles! O Hera, to thee is our call!
Artemis, maiden beloved! the air is distraught with the spears,
And whither doth destiny drive us, and where is the goal of our fears?

antistrophe 2

The blast of the terrible stones on the ridge of our wall is not stayed,
At the gates is the brazen clash of the bucklers—Apollo to aid!
Thou too, O daughter of Zeus, who guidest the wavering fray
To the holy decision of fate, Athena! be with us to-day!
Come down to the sevenfold gates and harry the foemen away!

strophe 3

O gods and O sisters of gods, our bulwark and guard! we beseech
That ye give not our war-worn hold to a rabble of alien speech!
List to the call of the maidens, the hands held up for the right,

antistrophe 3

Be near us, protect us, and show that the city is dear in your sight!
Have heed for her sacrifice holy, and thought of her offerings take,
Forget not her love and her worship, be near her and smite for her sake!

(ETEOCLES *and his retinue re-enter.*)

ETEOCLES (*addressing the* CHORUS)

Hark to my question, things detestable!
Is this aright and for the city's weal,
And helpful to our army thus beset,
That ye before the statues of our gods
Should fling yourselves, and scream and shriek your fears?
Immodest, uncontrolled! Be this my lot—
Never in troublous nor in peaceful days
To dwell with aught that wears a female form!
Where womankind has power, no man can house,
Where womankind feeds panic, ruin rules
Alike in house and city! Look you now—
Your flying feet, and rumour of your fears,
Have spread a soulless panic on our walls,
And they without do go from strength to strength,
And we within make breach upon ourselves!
Such fate it brings, to house with womankind.
Therefore if any shall resist my rule—
Or man, or woman, or some sexless thing—
The vote of sentence shall decide their doom,
And stones of execution, past escape,
Shall finish all. Let not a woman's voice
Be loud in council! for the things without,
A man must care; let women keep within—
Even then is mischief all too probable!
Hear ye? or speak I to unheeding ears?

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, but I shudder, child of Oedipus!
I heard the clash and clang!
The axles rolled and rumbled; woe to us,
Fire-welded bridles rang!

ETEOCLES

Say—when a ship is strained and deep in brine,
Did e'er a seaman mend his chance, who left
The helm, t' invoke the image at the prow?

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, but I fled to the shrines, I called to our helpers on high,
When the stone-shower roared at the portals!
I sped to the temples aloft, and loud was my call and my cry,
Look down and deliver, Immortals!

ETEOCLES

Ay, pray amain that stone may vanquish steel!
Where not that grace of gods? ay, ay—methinks,
When cities fall, the gods go forth from them!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, let me die, or ever I behold
The gods go forth, in conflagration dire!
The foemen's rush and raid, and all our hold
Wrapt in the burning fire!

ETEOCLES

Cry not on Heaven, in impotent debate!
What saith the saw?—*Good saving Strength, in verity,*
Out of Obedience breeds the babe Prosperity.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

'Tis true: yet stronger is the power divine,
And oft, when man's estate is overbowed
With bitter pangs, disperses from his eyne
The heavy, hanging cloud!

ETEOCLES

Let men with sacrifice and augury
Approach the gods, when comes the tug of war:
Maids must be silent and abide within.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

By grace of the gods we hold it, a city untamed of the spear,
And the battlement wards from the wall the foe and his aspect of fear!
What need of displeasure herein?

ETEOCLES

Ay, pay thy vows to Heaven; I grudge them not,
But—so thou strike no fear into our men—
Have calm at heart, nor be too much afraid.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Alack, it is fresh in mine ears, the clamour and crash of the fray,
And up to our holiest height I sped on my timorous way,
Bewildered, beset by the din!

ETEOCLES

Now, if ye hear the bruit of death or wounds,
Give not yourselves o'ermuch to shriek and scream,
For Ares ravins upon human flesh.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, but the snorting of the steeds I hear!

ETEOCLES

Then, if thou hearest, hear them not too well!

LEADER

Hark, the earth rumbles, as they close us round!

ETEOCLES

Enough if I am here, with plans prepared.

LEADER

Alack, the battering at the gates is loud!

ETEOCLES

Peace! stay your tongue, or else the town may hear!

LEADER

O warders of the walls, betray them not!

ETEOCLES

Beshrew your cries! in silence face your fate.

LEADER

Gods of our city, see me not enslaved!

ETEOCLES

On me, on all, thy cries bring slavery.

LEADER

Zeus, strong to smite, turn upon foes thy blow!

ETEOCLES

Zeus, what a curse are women, wrought by thee!

LEADER

Weak wretches, even as men, when cities fall.

ETEOCLES

What! clasping gods, yet voicing thy despair?

LEADER

In the sick heart, fear maketh prey of speech.

ETEOCLES

Light is the thing I ask thee—do my will!

LEADER

Ask swiftly: swiftly shall I know my power.

ETEOCLES

Silence, weak wretch! nor put thy friends in fear.

LEADER

I speak no more: the general fate be mine!

ETEOCLES

I take that word as wiser than the rest.
Nay, more: these images possess thy will—
Pray, in their strength, that Heaven be on our side!
Then hear my prayers withal, and then ring out
The female triumph-note, thy privilege—
Yea, utter forth the usage Hellas knows,
The cry beside the altars, sounding clear
Encouragement to friends, alarm to foes.
But I unto all gods that guard our walls,
Lords of the plain or warders of the mart
And to Ismenus' stream and Dirce's rills,
I swear, if Fortune smiles and saves our town,
That we will make our altars reek with blood
Of sheep and kine, shed forth unto the gods,
And with victorious tokens front our fanes—
Corslets and casques that once our foemen wore,
Spear-shattered now—to deck these holy homes!
Be such thy vows to Heaven—away with sighs,
Away with outcry vain and barbarous,
That shall avail not, in a general doom!
But I will back, and, with six chosen men
Myself the seventh, to confront the foe
In this great aspect of a poisèd war,
Return and plant them at the sevenfold gates,
Or e'er the prompt and clamorous battle-scouts
Haste to inflame our counsel with the need.

(ETEOCLES *and his retinue go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

I mark his words, yet, dark and deep,
My heart's alarm forbiddeth sleep!
Close-clinging cares around my soul
Enkindle fears beyond control,
Presageful of what doom may fall
From the great leaguer of the wall!
So a poor dove is faint with fear
For her weak nestlings, while anew
Glides on the snaky ravisher!
In troop and squadron, hand on hand,
They climb and throng, and hemmed we stand,
While on the warders of our town
The flinty shower comes hurtling down!
Gods born of Zeus! put forth your might
For Cadmus' city, realm, and right!

antistrophe 1

What nobler land shall e'er be yours,
If once ye give to hostile powers
The deep rich soil, and Dirce's wave,
The nursing stream, Poseidon gave
And Tethys' children? Up and save!
Cast on the ranks that hem us round
A deadly panic, make them fling
Their arms in terror on the ground,
And die in carnage! thence shall spring
High honour for our clan and king!
Come at our wailing cry, and stand
As thronèd sentries of our land!

strophe 2

For pity and sorrow it were that this immemorial town
Should sink to be slave of the spear, to dust and to ashes gone down,
By the gods of Achaean worship and arms of Achaean might
Sacked and defiled and dishonoured, its women the prize of the fight—
That, haled by the hair as a steed, their mantles dishevelled and torn,
The maiden and matron alike should pass to the wedlock of scorn!
I hear it arise from the city, the manifold wail of despair—
Woe, woe for the doom that shall be—as in grasp of the foeman they fare!

antistrophe 2

For a woe and a weeping it is, if the maiden inviolate flower
Is plucked by the foe in his might, not culled in the bridal bower!
Alas for the hate and the horror—how say it?—less hateful by far
Is the doom to be slain by the sword, hewn down in the carnage of war!
For wide, ah! wide is the woe when the foeman has mounted the wall;
There is havoc and terror and flame, and the dark smoke broods over all,
And wild is the war-god's breath, as in frenzy of conquest he springs,
And pollutes with the blast of his lips the glory of holiest things!

strophe 3

Up to the citadel rise clash and din,
The war-net closes in,
The spear is in the heart: with blood imbrued
Young mothers wail aloud,
For children at their breast who scream and die!
And boys and maidens fly,
Yet scape not the pursuer, in his greed
To thrust and grasp and feed!
Robber with robber joins, each calls his mate
Unto the feast of hate—
The banquet, lo! is spread—seize, rend, and tear!
No need to choose or share!

antistrophe 3

And all the wealth of earth to waste is poured—
A sight by all abhorred!
The grieving housewives eye it; heaped and blent,
Earth's boons are spoiled and spent,
And waste to nothingness; and O alas,
Young maids, forlorn ye pass—
Fresh horror at your hearts—beneath the power
Of those who crop the flower!
Ye own the ruffian ravisher for lord,
And night brings rites abhorred!
Woe, woe for you! upon your grief and pain
There comes a fouler stain.

(*On one side* THE SPY *enters; on the other,* ETEOCLES *and the* SIX CHAMPIONS.)

LEADER OF THE FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Look, friends! methinks the scout, who parted hence
To spy upon the foemen, comes with news,
His feet as swift as wafting chariot-wheels.

LEADER OF THE SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Ay, and our king, the son of Oedipus,
Comes prompt to time, to learn the spy's report—
His heart is fainer than his foot is fast!

THE SPY

Well have I scanned the foe, and well can say
Unto which chief, by lot, each gate is given.
Tydeus already with his onset-cry .
Storms at the gate called Proetides; but him
The seer Amphiaraus holds at halt,
Nor wills that he should cross Ismenus' ford,
Until the sacrifices promise fair.
But Tydeus, mad with lust of blood and broil,
Like to a cockatrice at noontide hour,
Hisses out wrath and smites with scourge of tongue
The prophet-son of Oecleus—*Wise thou art,*
Faint against war, and holding back from death!
With such revilings loud upon his lips
He waves the triple plumes that o'er his helm
Float overshadowing, as a courser's mane;
And at his shield's rim, terror in their tone,
Clang and reverberate the brazen bells.
And this proud sign, wrought on his shield, he bears—[1]
The vault of heaven, inlaid with blazing stars;
And, for the boss, the bright moon glows at full,
The eye of night, the first and lordliest star.
Thus with high-vaunted armour, madly bold,
He clamours by the stream-bank, wild for war,
As a steed panting grimly on his bit,
Held in and chafing for the trumpet's bray!
Whom wilt thou set against him? when the gates
Of Proetus yield, who can his rush repel?

ETEOCLES

To me, no blazon on a foeman's shield
Shall e'er present a fear! such pointed threats
Are powerless to wound; his plumes and bells,
Without a spear, are snakes without a sting.
Nay, more—that pageant of which thou tellest—
The nightly sky displayed, ablaze with stars,
Upon his shield, palters with double sense—
One headstrong fool will find its truth anon!

For, if night fall upon his eyes in death,
Yon vaunting blazon will its own truth prove,
And he is prophet of his folly's fall.
Mine shall it be, to pit against his power
The loyal son of Astacus, as guard
To hold the gateways—a right valiant soul,
Who has in heed the throne of Modesty
And loathes the speech of Pride, and evermore
Shrinks from the base, but knows no other fear.
He springs by stock from those whom Ares spared,
The men called Sown, a right son of the soil,
And Melanippus styled. Now, what his arm
To-day shall do, rests with the dice of war,
And Ares shall ordain it; but his cause
Hath the true badge of Right, to urge him on
To guard, as son, his motherland from wrong.

(MELANIPPUS *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Then may the gods give fortune fair
Unto our chief, sent forth to dare
War's terrible arbitrament!
But ah! when champions wend away,
I shudder, lest, from out the fray,
Only their blood-stained wrecks be sent!

THE SPY

Nay, let him pass, and the gods' help be his!
Next, Capaneus comes on, by lot to lead
The onset at the gates Electran styled:
A giant he, more huge than Tydeus' self,
And more than human in his arrogance—
May fate forefend his threat against our walls!
God willing, or unwilling—such his vaunt—
I will lay waste this city; Pallas' self,
Zeus's warrior maid, although she swoop to earth
And plant her in my path, shall stay me not.
And, for the flashes of the levin-bolt,
He holds them harmless as the noontide rays.
Mark, too, the symbol on his shield—a man
Scornfully weaponless but torch in hand,
And the flame glows within his grasp, prepared
For ravin: lo, the legend, wrought in words,

Fire for the city bring I, flares in gold!
Against such wight, send forth—yet whom? what man
Will front that vaunting figure and not fear?

ETEOCLES

Aha, this profits also, gain on gain!
In sooth, for mortals, the tongue's utterance
Bewrays unerringly a foolish pride!
Hither stalks Capaneus, with vaunt and threat
Defying god-like powers, equipt to act,
And, mortal though he be, he strains his tongue
In folly's ecstasy, and casts aloft
High swelling words against the ears of Zeus.
Right well I trust—if justice grants the word—
That, by the might of Zeus, a bolt of flame
In more than semblance shall descend on him.
Against his vaunts, though reckless, I have set,
To make assurance sure, a warrior stern—
Strong Polyphontes, fervid for the fray;—
A sturdy bulwark, he, by grace of Heaven
And favour of his champion Artemis!
Say on, who holdeth the next gate in ward?

(POLYPHONTES *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Perish the wretch whose vaunt affronts our home!
On him the red bolt come,
Ere to the maiden bowers his way he cleave,
To ravage and bereave!

THE SPY

I will say on. Eteoclus is third—
To him it fell, what time the third lot sprang
O'er the inverted helmet's brazen rim,
To dash his stormers on Neistae gate.
He wheels his mares, who at their frontlets chafe
And yearn to charge upon the gates amain.
They snort the breath of pride, and, filled therewith,
Their nozzles whistle with barbaric sound.
High too and haughty is his shield's device—
An armèd man who climbs, from rung to rung,
A scaling ladder, up a hostile wall,
Afire to sack and slay; and he too cries
(By letters, full of sound, upon the shield)

Not Ares' self shall cast me from the wall.
Look to it, send, against this man, a man
Strong to debar the slave's yoke from our town.

ETEOCLES (*pointing to* MEGAREUS)
Send will I—even this man, with luck to aid—

(MEGAREUS *departs as soon as he has been marked out.*)

By his worth sent already, not by pride
And vain pretence, is he. 'Tis Megareus,
The child of Creon, of the Earth-sprung born!
He will not shrink from guarding of the gates,
Nor fear the maddened charger's frenzied neigh,
But, if he dies, will nobly quit the score
For nurture to the land that gave him birth,
Or from the shield-side hew two warriors down—
Eteoclus and the figure that he lifts—
Ay, and the city pictured, all in one,
And deck with spoils the temple of his sire!
Announce the next pair, stint not of thy tongue!

CHORUS (*chanting*)
O thou, the warder of my home,
Grant, unto us, Fate's favouring tide,
Send on the foemen doom!
They fling forth taunts of frenzied pride,
On them may Zeus with glare of vengeance come!

THE SPY
Lo, next him stands a fourth and shouts amain,
By Pallas Onca's portal, and displays
A different challenge; 'tis Hippomedon!
Huge the device that starts up from his targe
In high relief; and, I deny it not,
I shuddered, seeing how, upon the rim,
It made a mighty circle round the shield—
No sorry craftsman he, who wrought that work
And clamped it all around the buckler's edge!
The form was Typhon: from his glowing throat
Rolled lurid smoke, spark-litten, kin of fire!
The flattened edge-work, circling round the whole,
Made strong support for coiling snakes that grew
Erect above the concave of the shield:
Loud rang the warrior's voice; inspired for war,

He raves to slay, as doth a Bacchanal,
His very glance a terror! of such wight
Beware the onset! closing on the gates,
He peals his vaunting and appalling cry!

ETEOCLES

Yet first our Pallas Onca—wardress she,
Planting her foot hard by her gate—shall stand,
The Maid against the ruffian, and repel
His force, as from her brood the mother-bird
Beats back the wintered serpent's venom'd fang.
And next, by her, is Oenops' gallant son,
Hyperbius, chosen to confront this foe,
Ready to seek his fate at Fortune's shrine!
In form, in valour, and in skill of arms,
None shall gainsay him. See how wisely well
Hermes hath set the brave against the strong!
Confronted shall they stand, the shield of each
Bearing the image of opposing gods:
One holds aloft his Typhon breathing fire,
But, on the other's shield, in symbol sits
Zeus, calm and strong, and fans his bolt to flame—
Zeus, seen of all, yet seen of none to fail!
Howbeit, weak is trust reposed in Heaven—
Yet are we upon Zeus' victorious side,
The foe, with those he worsted—if in sooth
Zeus against Typhon held the upper hand,
And if Hyperbius (as well may hap
When two such foes such diverse emblems bear)
Have Zeus upon his shield, a saving sign.

(HYPERBIUS *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

High faith is mine that he whose shield
Bears, against Zeus, the thing of hate.
The giant Typhon, thus revealed,
A monster loathed of gods eterne
And mortal men—this doom shall earn
A shattered skull, before the gate!

THE SPY

Heaven send it so! A fifth assailant now
Is set against our fifth, the northern, gate,
Fronting the death-mound where Amphion lies

The child of Zeus. This foeman vows his faith,
Upon a mystic spear-head which he deems
More holy than a godhead and more sure
To find its mark than any glance of eye,
That, will they, nill they, he will storm and sack
The hold of the Cadmeans. Such his oath—
His, the bold warrior, yet of childish years,
A bud of beauty's foremost flower, the son
Of Zeus and of the mountain maid. I mark
How the soft down is waxing on his cheek,
Thick and close-growing in its tender prime—
In name, not mood, is he a maiden's child—
Parthenopaeus; large and bright his eyes
But fierce the wrath wherewith he fronts the gate:
Yet not unheralded he takes his stand
Before the portal; on his brazen shield,
The rounded screen and shelter of his form,
I saw him show the ravening Sphinx, the fiend
That shamed our city—how it glared and moved,
Clamped on the buckler, wrought in high relief!
And in its claws did a Cadmean bear—
Nor heretofore, for any single prey,
Sped she aloft, through such a storm of darts
As now awaits her. So our foe is here—
Like, as I deem, to ply no stinted trade
In blood and broil, but traffick as is meet
In fierce exchange for his long wayfaring!

ETEOCLES

Ah, may they meet the doom they think to bring—
They and their impious vaunts—from those on high!
So should they sink, hurled down to deepest death!
This foe, at least, by thee Arcadian styled,
Is faced by one who bears no braggart sign,
But his hand sees to smite, where blows avail—
Actor, own brother to Hyperbius!
He will not let a boast without a blow
Stream through our gates and nourish our despair,
Nor give him way who on his hostile shield
Bears the brute image of the loathly Sphinx!
Blocked at the gate, she will rebuke the man
Who strives to thrust her forward, when she feels
Thick crash of blows, up to the city wall.

With Heaven's goodwill, my forecast shall be true.
(ACTOR *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Home to my heart the vaunting goes,
And, quick with terror, on my head
Rises my hair, at sound of those
Who wildly, impiously rave!
If gods there be, to them I plead—
Give them to darkness and the grave.

THE SPY
Fronting the sixth gate stands another foe,
Wisest of warriors, bravest among seers—
Such must I name Amphiaraus: he,
Set steadfast at the Homoloid gate,
Berates strong Tydeus with reviling words—
The man of blood, the bane of state and home,
To Argos, arch-allurer to all ill,
Evoker of the Fury-fiend of hell,
Death's minister, and counsellor of wrong
Unto Adrastus in this fatal field.
Ay, and with eyes upturned and mien of scorn
He chides thy brother Polyneices too
At his desert, and once and yet again
Dwells hard and meaningly upon his name
Where it saith *glory* yet importeth *feud.*
Yea, such thou art in act, and such thy grace
In sight of Heaven, and such in aftertime
Thy fame, for lips and ears of mortal men!
"He strove to sack the city of his sires
And temples of her gods, and brought on her
An alien armament of foreign foes.
The fountain of maternal blood outpoured
What power can staunch? even so, thy fatherland
Once by thine ardent malice stormed and ta'en,
Shall ne'er join force with thee." For me, I know
It doth remain to let my blood enrich
The border of this land that loves me not—
Blood of a prophet, in a foreign grave!
Now, for the battle! I foreknow my doom,
Yet it shall be with honour. So he spake,
The prophet, holding up his targe of bronze
Wrought without blazon, to the ears of men

Who stood around and heeded not his word.
For on no bruit and rumour of great deeds,
But on their doing, is his spirit set,
And in his heart he reaps a furrow rich,
Wherefrom the foison of good counsel springs.
Against him, send brave heart and hand of might,
For the god-lover is man's fiercest foe.

ETEOCLES

Out on the chance that couples mortal men,
Linking the just and impious in one!
In every issue, the one curse is this—
Companionship with men of evil heart!
A baneful harvest, let none gather it!
The field of sin is rank, and brings forth death
At whiles a righteous man who goes aboard
With reckless mates, a horde of villainy,
Dies by one death with that detested crew;
At whiles the just man, joined with citizens
Ruthless to strangers, recking nought of Heaven,
Trapped, against nature, in one net with them,
Dies by God's thrust and all-including blow.
So will this prophet die, even Oecleus' child,
Sage, just, and brave, and loyal towards Heaven,
Potent in prophecy, but mated here
With men of sin, too boastful to be wise!
Long is their road, and they return no more,
And, at their taking-off, by hand of Zeus,
The prophet too shall take the downward way.
He will not—so I deem—assail the gate—
Not as through cowardice or feeble will,
But as one knowing to what end shall be
Their struggle in the battle, if indeed
Fruit of fulfilment lie in Loxias' word.
He speaketh not, unless to speak avails!
Yet, for more surety, we will post a man,
Strong Lasthenes, as warder of the gate,
Stern to the foeman; he hath age's skill,
Mated with youthful vigour, and an eye
Forward, alert; swift too his hand, to catch
The fenceless interval 'twixt shield and spear!
Yet man's good fortune lies in hand of Heaven.

(LASTHENES *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Unto our loyal cry, ye gods, give ear!
Save, save the city! turn away the spear,
Send on the foemen fear!
Outside the rampart fall they, rent and riven
Beneath the bolt of heaven!

THE SPY

Last, let me name yon seventh antagonist,
Thy brother's self, at the seventh portal set—
Hear with what wrath he imprecates our doom,
Vowing to mount the wall, though banished hence,
And peal aloud the wild exulting cry—
The town is ta'en—then clash his sword with thine,
Giving and taking death in close embrace,
Or, if thou 'scapest, flinging upon thee,
As robber of his honour and his home,
The doom of exile such as he has borne.
So clamours he and so invokes the gods
Who guard his race and home, to hear and heed
The curse that sounds in Polyneices' name!
He bears a round shield, fresh from forge and fire,
And wrought upon it is a twofold sign—
For lo, a woman leads decorously
The figure of a warrior wrought in gold;
And thus the legend runs—*I Justice am,*
And I will bring the hero home again,
To hold once more his place within this town,
Once more to pace his sire's ancestral hall.
Such are the symbols, by our foemen shown—
Now make thine own decision, whom to send
Against this last opponent! I have said—
Nor canst thou in my tidings find a flaw—
Thine is it, now, to steer the course aright.

ETEOCLES

Ah me, the madman, and the curse of Heaven!
And woe for us, the lamentable line
Of Oedipus, and woe that in this house
Our father's curse must find accomplishment!
But now, a truce to tears and loud lament,
Lest they should breed a still more rueful wail!
As for this Polyneices, named too well,
Soon shall we know how this device shall end—

Whether the gold-wrought symbols on his shield,
In their mad vaunting and bewildered pride,
Shall guide him as a victor to his home!
For had but Justice, maiden-child of Zeus,
Stood by his act and thought, it might have been!
Yet never, from the day he reached the light
Out of the darkness of his mother's womb,
Never in childhood, nor in youthful prime,
Nor when his chin was gathering its beard,
Hath Justice hailed or claimed him as her own.
Therefore I deem not that she standeth now
To aid him in this outrage on his home!
Misnamed, in truth, were Justice, utterly,
If to impiety she lent her hand.
Sure in this faith, I will myself go forth
And match me with him; who hath fairer claim?
Ruler, against one fain to snatch the rule,
Brother with brother matched, and foe with foe,
Will I confront the issue. To the wall!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O thou true heart, O child of Oedipus,
Be not, in wrath, too like the man whose name
Murmurs an evil omen! 'Tis enough
That Cadmus' clan should strive with Argos' host,
For blood there is that can atone that stain!
But—brother upon brother dealing death—
Not time itself can expiate the sin!

ETEOCLES

If man find hurt, yet clasp his honour still,
'Tis well; the dead have honour, nought beside.
Hurt, with dishonour, wins no word of praise!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, what is thy desire?
Let not the lust and ravin of the sword
Bear thee adown the tide accursed, abhorred!
Fling off thy passion's rage, thy spirit's prompting dire!

ETEOCLES

Nay—since the god is urgent for our doom,
Let Laius' house, by Phoebus loathed and scorned,
Follow the gale of destiny, and win
Its great inheritance, the gulf of hell!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ruthless thy craving is—
Craving for kindred and forbidden blood
To be outpoured—a sacrifice imbrued
With sin, a bitter fruit of murderous enmities!

ETEOCLES

Yea, my own father's fateful Curse proclaims—
A ghastly presence, and her eyes are dry—
Strike! honour is the prize, not life prolonged!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, be not urged of her! for none shall dare
To call thee *coward,* in thy throned estate!
Will not the Fury in her sable pall
Pass outward from these halls, what time the gods
Welcome a votive offering from our hands?

ETEOCLES

The gods! long since they hold us in contempt,
Scornful of gifts thus offered by the lost!
Why should we fawn and flinch away from doom?

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Now, when it stands beside thee! for its power
May, with a changing gust of milder mood,
Temper the blast that bloweth wild and rude
And frenzied, in this hour!

ETEOCLES

Ay, kindled by the curse of Oedipus—
All too prophetic, out of dreamland came
The vision, meting out our sire's estate!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Heed women's voices, though thou love them not!

ETEOCLES

Say aught that may avail, but stint thy words.

LEADER

Go not thou forth to guard the seventh gate!

ETEOCLES

Words shall not blunt the edge of my resolve.

LEADER

Yet the god loves to let the weak prevail.

ETEOCLES

That to a swordsman, is no welcome word!

LEADER

Shall thine own brother's blood be victory's palm?

ETEOCLES

Ill which the gods have sent thou canst not shun!

(ETEOCLES *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

I shudder in dread of the power, abhorred by the gods of high heaven,
The ruinous curse of the home till roof-tree and rafter be riven!
Too true are the visions of ill, too true the fulfilment they bring
To the curse that was spoken of old by the frenzy and wrath of the king!
Her will is the doom of the children, and Discord is kindled amain,

antistrophe 1

And strange is the Lord of Division, who cleaveth the birthright in twain,—
The edged thing, born of the north, the steel that is ruthless and keen,
Dividing in bitter division the lot of the children of teen!
Not the wide lowland around, the realm of their sire, shall they have,
Yet enough for the dead to inherit, the pitiful space of a grave!

strophe 2

Ah, but when kin meets kin, when sire and child,
Unknowing, are defiled
By shedding common blood, and when the pit
Of death devoureth it,
Drinking the clotted stain, the gory dye—
Who, who can purify?
Who cleanse pollution, where the ancient bane
Rises and reeks again?

antistrophe 2

Whilome in olden days the sin was wrought,
And swift requital brought—
Yea on the children of the child came still
New heritage of ill!
For thrice Apollo spoke this word divine,
From Delphi's central shrine,

To Laius—*Die thou childless! thus alone*
Can the land's weal be won!

strophe 3

But vainly with his wife's desire he strove,
And gave himself to love,
Begetting Oedipus, by whom he died,
The fateful parricide!
The sacred seed-plot, his own mother's womb,
He sowed, his house's doom,
A root of blood! by frenzy lured, they came
Unto their wedded shame.

antistrophe 3

And now the waxing surge, the wave of fate,
Rolls on them, triply great—
One billow sinks, the next towers, high and dark,
Above our city's bark—
Only the narrow barrier of the wall
Totters, as soon to fall;
And, if our chieftains in the storm go down,
What chance can save the town?

strophe 4

Curses, inherited from long ago,
Bring heavy freight of woe:
Rich stores of merchandise o'erload the deck,
Near, nearer comes the wreck—
And all is lost, cast out upon the wave,
Floating, with none to save!

antistrophe 4

Whom did the gods, whom did the chief of men,
Whom did each citizen
In crowded concourse, in such honour hold,
As Oedipus of old,
When the grim fiend, that fed on human prey,
He took from us away?

strophe 5

But when, in the fulness of days, he knew of his bridal unblest,
A twofold horror he wrought, in the frenzied despair of his breast—
Debarred from the grace of the banquet, the service of goblets of gold,
He flung on his children a curse for the splendour they dared to withhold,

antistrophe 5

A curse prophetic and bitter—*The glory of wealth and of pride,*
With iron, not gold, in your hands, ye shall come, at the last, to divide!
Behold, how a shudder runs through me, lest now, in the fulness of time,
The house-fiend awake and return, to mete out the measure of crime!
(THE SPY *enters.*)

THE SPY

Take heart, ye daughters whom your mothers' milk
Made milky-hearted! lo, our city stands,
Saved from the yoke of servitude: the vaunts
Of overweening men are silent now,
And the State sails beneath a sky serene,
Nor in the manifold and battering waves
Hath shipped a single surge, and solid stands
The rampart, and the gates are made secure,
Each with a single champion's trusty guard.
So in the main and at six gates we hold
A victory assured; but, at the seventh,
The god that on the seventh day was born,
Royal Apollo, hath ta'en up his rest
To wreak upon the sons of Oedipus
Their grandsire's wilfulness of long ago.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What further woefulness besets our home?

THE SPY

The home stands safe—but ah, the princes twain—

LEADER

Who? what of them? I am distraught with fear.

THE SPY

Hear now, and mark! the sons of Oedipus—

LEADER

Ah, my prophetic soul! I feel their doom.

THE SPY

Have done with questions!—with their lives crushed out—

LEADER

Lie they out yonder? the full horror speak!
Did hands meet hands more close than brotherly?
Came fate on each, and in the selfsame hour?

THE SPY

Yea, blotting out the lineage ill-starred!
Now mix your exultation and your tears,
Over a city saved, the while its lords,
Twin leaders of the fight, have parcelled out
With forged arbitrament of Scythian steel
The full division of their fatherland,
And, as their father's imprecation bade,
Shall have their due of land, a twofold grave.
So is the city saved; the earth has drunk
Blood of twin princes, by each other slain.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O mighty Zeus and guardian powers,
The strength and stay of Cadmus' towers!
Shall I send forth a joyous cry,
Hail to the lord of weal renewed?
Or weep the misbegotten twain,
Born to a fatal destiny
Each numbered now among the slain,
Each dying in ill fortitude,
Each *truly named,* each *child of feud?*
O dark and all-prevailing ill,
That broods o'er Oedipus and all his line,
Numbing my heart with mortal chill!
Ah me, this song of mine,
Which, Thyad-like, I woke, now falleth still,
Or only tells of doom,
And echoes round a tomb!
Dead are they, dead! in their own blood they lie—
Ill-omened the concent that hails our victory!
The curse a father on his children spake
Hath faltered not, nor failed!
Nought, Laius! thy stubborn choice availed—
First to beget, then, in the after day
And for the city's sake,
The child to slay!
For nought can blunt nor mar
The speech oracular!
Children of teen! by disbelief ye erred—
Yet in wild weeping came fulfilment of the word!

(ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE *approach, with a train of mourners, bearing the bodies of* ETEOCLES *and* POLYNEICES.)

Look up, look forth! the doom is plain,
Nor spake the messenger in vain!
A twofold sorrow, twofold strife—
Each brave against a brother's life!
In double doom hath sorrow come—
How shall I speak it?—on the home!
Alas, my sisters! be your sighs the gale,
The smiting of your brows the plash of oars,
Wafting the boat, to Acheron's dim shores
That passeth ever, with its darkened sail,
On its uncharted voyage and sunless way,
Far from thy beams, Apollo, god of day—
The melancholy bark
Bound for the common bourn, the harbour of the dark!

Look up, look yonder! from the home
Antigone, Ismene come,
On the last, saddest errand bound,
To chant a dirge of doleful sound,
With agony of equal pain
Above their brethren slain!
Their sister-bosoms surely swell,
Heart with rent heart according well
In grief for those who fought and fell!
Yet—ere they utter forth their woe—
We must awake the rueful strain
To vengeful powers, in realms below,
And mourn hell's triumph o'er the slain!

Alas! of all, the breast who bind,—
Yea, all the race of womankind—
O maidens, ye are most bereaved!
For you, for you the tear-drops start—
Deem that in truth, and undeceived,
Ye hear the sorrows of my heart!

(*To the dead*)

Children of bitterness, and sternly brave—
One, proud of heart against persuasion's voice,
One, against exile proof! ye win your choice—
Each in your fatherland, a separate grave!

Alack, on house and heritage
They brought a baneful doom, and death for wage!
One strove through tottering walls to force his way,
One claimed, in bitter arrogance, the sway,
And both alike, even now and here,
Have closed their suit, with steel for arbiter!
And lo, the Fury-fiend of Oedipus, their sire,
Hath brought his curse to consummation dire
Each in the left side smitten, see them laid—
The children of one womb,
Slain by a mutual doom!
Alas, their fate! the combat murderous,
The horror of the house,
The curse of ancient bloodshed, now repaid!
Yea, deep and to the heart the deathblow fell,
Edged by their feud ineffable—
By the grim curse, their sire did imprecate—
Discord and deadly hate!
Hark, how the city and its towers make moan—
How the land mourns that held them for its own!
Fierce greed and fell division did they blend,
Till death made end!
They strove to part the heritage in twain,
Giving to each a gain—
Yet that which struck the balance in the strife,
The arbitrating sword,
By those who loved the twain is held abhorred—
Loathed is the god of death, who sundered each from life!
Here, by the stroke of steel, behold! they lie—
And rightly may we cry
Beside their fathers, let them here be laid—
Iron gave their doom, with iron their graves be made—
Alack, the slaying sword, alack, th' entombing spade!
Alas, a piercing shriek, a rending groan,
A cry unfeigned of sorrow felt at heart!
With shuddering of grief, with tears that start,
With wailful escort, let them hither come—
For one or other make divided moan!
No light lament of pity mixed with gladness,
But with true tears, poured from the soul of sadness,
Over the princes dead and their bereavèd home
Say we, above these brethren dead,
On citizen, on foreign foe,

Brave was their rush, and stern their blow—
Now, lowly are they laid!
Beyond all women upon earth
Woe, woe for her who gave them birth!
Unknowingly, her son she wed—
The children of that marriage-bed,
Each in the self-same womb, were bred—
Each by a brother's hand lies dead!

Yea, from one seed they sprang, and by one fate
Their heritage is desolate,
The heart's division sundered claim from claim,
And, from their feud, death came!
Now is their hate allayed,
Now is their life-stream shed,
Ensanguining the earth with crimson dye—
Lo, from one blood they sprang, and in one blood they lie!
A grievous arbiter was given the twain—
The stranger from the northern main,
The sharp, dividing sword,
Fresh from the forge and fire
The War-god treacherous gave ill award
And brought their father's curse to a fulfilment dire!
They have their portion—each his lot and doom,
Given from the gods on high!
Yea, the piled wealth of fatherland, for tomb,
Shall underneath them lie!
Alas, alas! with flowers of fame and pride
Your home ye glorified;
But, in the end, the Furies gathered round
With chants of boding sound,
Shrieking, *In wild defeat and disarray,*
Behold, ye pass away!
The sign of Ruin standeth at the gate,
There, where they strove with Fate—
And the ill power beheld the brothers' fall,
And triumphed over all!

(ANTIGONE, ISMENE, *and the* CHORUS *all take part in the following responsive dirge.*)

Thou wert smitten, in smiting,
Thou didst slay, and wert slain—
By the spear of each other

Ye lie on the plain,
And ruthless the deed that ye wrought was, and ruthless the death of the twain!

Take voice, O my sorrow!
Flow tear upon tear—
Lay the slain by the slayer,
Made one on the bier!
Our soul in distraction is lost, and we mourn o'er the prey of the spear!

Ah, woe for your ending,
Unbrotherly wrought!
And woe for the issue,
The fray that ye fought,
The doom of a mutual slaughter whereby to the grave ye are brought!

Ah, twofold the sorrow—
The heard and the seen!
And double the tide
Of our tears and our teen,
As we stand by our brothers in death and wail for the love that has been!

O grievous the fate
That attends upon wrong!
Stern ghost of our sire,
Thy vengeance is long!
Dark Fury of hell and of death, the hands of thy kingdom are strong!

O dark were the sorrows
That exile hath known!
He slew, but returned not
Alive to his own!
He struck down a brother, but fell, in the moment of triumph hewn down!

O lineage accurst,
O doom and despair!
Alas, for their quarrel,
The brothers that were!

And woe! for their pitiful end, who once were our love and our care!

O grievous the fate
That attends upon wrong!
Stern ghost of our sire,
Thy vengeance is long!
Dark Fury of hell and of death, the hands of thy kingdom are strong!

By proof have ye learnt it!
At once and as one,
O brothers belovèd,
To death ye were done!
Ye came to the strife of the sword, and behold! ye are both overthrown!

O grievous the tale is,
And grievous their fall,
To the house, to the land,
And to me above all!
Ah, God! for the curse that hath come, the sin and the ruin withal!

O children distraught,
Who in madness have died!
Shall ye rest with old kings
In the place of their pride?
Alas for the wrath of your sire if he findeth you laid by his side!

(*A* HERALD *enters.*)

HERALD

I bear command to tell to one and all
What hath approved itself and now is law,
Ruled by the counsellors of Cadmus' town.
For this Eteocles, it is resolved
To lay him on his earth-bed, in this soil,
Not without care and kindly sepulture.
For why? he hated those who hated us,
And, with all duties blamelessly performed
Unto the sacred ritual of his sires,
He met such end as gains our city's grace,—
With auspices that do ennoble death.

Such words I have in charge to speak of him:
But of his brother Polyneices, this—
Be he cast out unburied, for the dogs
To rend and tear: for he presumed to waste
The land of the Cadmeans, had not Heaven—
Some god of those who aid our fatherland—
Opposed his onset, by his brother's spear,
To whom, tho' dead, shall consecration come!
Against him stood this wretch, and brought a horde
Of foreign foemen, to beset our town.
He therefore shall receive his recompense,
Buried ignobly in the maw of kites—
No women-wailers to escort his corpse
Nor pile his tomb nor shrill his dirge anew—
Unhouselled, unattended, cast away!
So, for these brothers, doth our State ordain.

ANTIGONE

And I—to those who make such claims of rule
In Cadmus' town—I, though no other help,

(*Pointing to the body of* POLYNEICES)

I, I will bury this my brother's corse
And risk your wrath and what may come of it!
It shames me not to face the State, and set
Will against power, rebellion resolute:
Deep in my heart is set my sisterhood,
My common birthright with my brothers, born
All of one womb, her children who, for woe,
Brought forth sad offspring to a sire ill-starred.
Therefore, my soul! take thou thy willing share,
In aid of him who now can will no more,
Against this outrage: be a sister true,
While yet thou livest, to a brother dead!
Him never shall the wolves with ravening maw
Rend and devour: I do forbid the thought!
I for him, I—albeit a woman weak—
In place of burial-pit, will give him rest
By this protecting handful of light dust
Which, in the lap of this poor linen robe,
I bear to hallow and bestrew his corpse
With the due covering. Let none gainsay!
Courage and craft shall arm me, this to do.

HERALD
I charge thee, not to flout the city's law!

ANTIGONE
I charge thee, use no useless heralding!

HERALD
Stern is a people newly 'scaped from death.

ANTIGONE
Whet thou their sternness! burial he shall have.

HERALD
How? grace of burial, to the city's foe?

ANTIGONE
God hath not judged him separate in guilt.

HERALD
True—till he put this land in jeopardy.

ANTIGONE
His rights usurped, he answered wrong with wrong.

HERALD
Nay—but for one man's sin he smote the State.

ANTIGONE
Contention doth out-talk all other gods!
Prate thou no more—I will to bury him.

HERALD
Will, an thou wilt! but I forbid the deed.
(*The* HERALD *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)
Exulting Fates, who waste the line
  And whelm the house of Oedipus!
Fiends, who have slain, in wrath condign,
  The father and the children thus!
What now befits it that I do,
What meditate, what undergo?
Can I the funeral rite refrain,
Nor weep for Polyneices slain?
But yet, with fear I shrink and thrill,
Presageful of the city's will!
Thou, O Eteocles, shalt have

Full rites, and mourners at thy grave,
But he, thy brother slain, shall he,
With none to weep or cry *Alas,*
To unbefriended burial pass?
Only one sister o'er his bier,
To raise the cry and pour the tear—
Who can obey such stern decree?

SEMI-CHORUS

Let those who hold our city's sway
  Wreak, or forbear to wreak, their will
On those who cry, *Ah, well-a-day!*
  Lamenting Polyneices still!
We will go forth and, side by side
With her, due burial will provide!
Royal he was; to him be paid
Our grief, wherever he be laid!
The crowd may sway, and change, and still
Take its caprice for Justice' will!
  But we this dead Eteocles,
  As Justice wills and Right decrees,
    Will bear unto his grave!
  For—under those enthroned on high
  And Zeus' eternal royalty—
  He unto us salvation gave!
    He saved us from a foreign yoke,—
    A wild assault of outland folk,
  A savage, alien wave!

NOTE FOR THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

THE Theban legend is interpreted in several of its aspects by Sophocles in *Oedipus the King, Antigone,* and *Oedipus at Colonus,* and by Euripides in *The Suppliants* and *The Phoenissae.*

1. The descriptions of the decorations upon the shields reflect the literary convention found in Homer's description of the shield of Achilles, *Iliad,* XVIII, and Hesiod's *Shield of Heracles.* All these passages constitute evidence for the extent to which awareness of objects of art existed at these periods. Cf. also the opening chorus of Euripides' *Ion.*

IV
PROMETHEUS BOUND

Characters in the Play

Power
Force
Hephaestus
Prometheus
Chorus of the Daughters of Oceanus
Oceanus
Io
Hermes

INTRODUCTION

FEW Greek tragedies present as many critical difficulties as does the *Prometheus Bound.* In the first place even its authenticity has been doubted, although this view has not commanded any general acceptance. Its date is likewise uncertain. Some scholars have placed it before *The Persians,* while others have insisted that it must have been composed much later, at a time not far removed from that of the *Oresteia.* Further, although the play is presumably one part of a trilogy, critics have not been able to determine with exactness what place it occupied in the larger dramatic unit and what was the content of its companion plays. Lastly, the question of its larger significance has provided ample material for critical debate.

So far as our information goes, we may with fair assurance accept the theory, now generally held, that the *Prometheus Bound* was the first play of the trilogy, followed by *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer.* In the trilogy the poet has treated in detail the legend of the great Titan, who took pity on the helplessness of men, and gave them the precious gift of fire which he stole from Heaven, wherewith they were able to improve their state and to learn the arts of civilization. Prometheus' theft contravened an ordinance of Zeus, the newly established Lord of Heaven, who had determined to destroy the race of men. Our play deals with Zeus' punishment of his rebellious subject, while the second of the series told of Prometheus' release, and the third, about which we have scarcely any knowledge, may have connected the legend with the institution of some religious festival of the Athenians.

In the *Prometheus Bound* Aeschylus was faced with a difficult problem of dramaturgy since he had to build a play in which his central character could not move, in a very literal sense of the word. Consequently the poet found himself considerably limited in scope and was forced practically to eliminate from his play anything which we might call "action." Aeschylus solves the problem by introducing several characters who in one way or another set off the central figure. He contrasts Prometheus now with Oceanus, now with Io his fellow-sufferer at the hands of Zeus, and finally with Hermes, the "lackey of Zeus" as Prometheus bitterly

calls him. In and through the dialogues between Prometheus and his various interlocutors gradually emerges the poet's analysis of the questions he is raising in the play.

Since we do not possess the rest of the trilogy, any attempt to give a general interpretation of the *Prometheus Bound* is hazardous. At least some points are certain. Here we have a play whose dramatic date lies almost at the beginning of mythological time. Furthermore, all the characters, save Io, are superhuman. Hence the poet has given the play a greater elevation than is to be found elsewhere in the extant Greek drama. Of course, he loses in "realism," but, to compensate this loss, he has put himself in a position whence he may appropriately attack the central problem which he has before him. This problem appears to be "What is the nature of the divine power which lies behind the universe? If that power is benevolent, beneficent or good, why is it that man suffers? Why is there evil in the world?" Our play seems to contain only the preliminaries to some kind of resolution of this most difficult of all philosophical and religious problems. Prometheus, the benignant, the "Suffering Servant," the benefactor of mankind, is posed against Zeus, the malignant tyrant, omnipotent, though not omniscient. A quasi-allegory or partial symbolism may be present here in this opposition between wisdom and brute force.

The critical problem still remains. How can the Zeus of the *Prometheus Bound* be reconciled with the Zeus of *The Suppliants* or the *Oresteia*? If we are justified in suggesting that the play is oriented towards the problem of evil and the nature of the power behind the universe, then the anthropomorphic aspects of Zeus and Prometheus in the play tend to diminish in importance, as well as certain accidental details of the legend. As a result, criticism which sees in Prometheus the normal "tragic hero," possessed with the "tragic flaw" of stubbornness, appears to become less relevant. How the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus was finally resolved by Aeschylus, or if he ever did resolve it in this trilogy, we probably shall never discover. Shelley has made the best-known attempt to repair the loss of the remaining plays. In any event, in the play one may well see the poet endeavouring to offer an interpretation of the divine nature which somehow is at once all-powerful and at once ultimately wise, and yet exercises control over a world in which the fact of evil is present. The play will always constitute a challenge to the critical imagination. The conclusion of the *Oresteia,* which deals with essentially the same religious and philosophical problem, may contain a clue to the enigma of the *Prometheus Bound.*

PROMETHEUS BOUND

(SCENE:—*A rocky gorge in Scythia.* POWER *and* FORCE *enter, carrying* PROMETHEUS *as a captive. They are accompanied by* HEPHAESTUS.)

POWER

To THIS far region of the earth, this pathless wilderness of Scythia, at last we are come. O Hephaestus, thine is the charge, on thee are laid the Father's commands in never-yielding fetters linked of adamant to bind this miscreant to the high-ridged rocks. For this is he who stole the flame of all-working fire, thy own bright flower, and gave to mortal men. Now for the evil done he pays this forfeit to the gods; so haply he shall learn some patience with the reign of Zeus and put away his love for human kind.

HEPHAESTUS

O Power and Force, your share in the command of Zeus is done, and for you nothing remains; but I—some part of courage still is wanting to bind with force a kindred god to this winter-bitten gorge. Yet must I summon daring to my heart, such dread dwells in the Father's word.—(*to* PROMETHEUS) O high magnanimous son of prudent Themis, against thy will and mine with brazen bonds no hand can loose I bind thee to this unvisited lonely rock. No human voice will reach thee here, nor any form of man be seen. Parched by the blazing fires of the sun thy skin shall change its pleasant hue; grateful to thee the starry-kirtled night shall come veiling the day, and grateful again the sun dispelling the morn's white frost. Forever the weariness of unremitting pain shall waste thy strength, for he is not born who can deliver thee. See now the profit of thy human charity: thou, a god not fearing the wrath of the gods, hast given to mortal men honors beyond their due; and therefore on this joyless rock thou must keep vigil, sleepless and weary-clinging, with unbended knees, pouring out thy ceaseless lamentations and unheeded cries; for the mind of Zeus knows no turning, and ever harsh the hand that newly grasps the sway.

POWER

It may be so, yet why seek delay in vainly spent pity? Feel you no hatred for this enemy of the gods, who hath betrayed to mortals your own chief honor?

HEPHAESTUS

Kinship and old fellowship will have their due.

POWER

'Tis true; but where is strength to disobey the father's words? Fearest thou not rather this?

HEPHAESTUS

Ever merciless thou art, and steeped in cruelty.

POWER

It healeth nothing to weep for him. Take not up an idle burden wherein there is no profit.

HEPHAESTUS

Alas, my cherished craft, thrice hateful now!

POWER

Why hateful? In simple sooth thy art hath no blame for these present ills.

HEPHAESTUS

Yet would it were another's, not mine!

POWER

All toil alike in sorrow, unless one were lord of heaven; none is truly free, save only Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS

This task confirms it; I can nothing deny.

POWER

Make haste then to bind him in fetters, lest the father detect thee loitering.

HEPHAESTUS

Behold the curb; it is ready to hand.

POWER

Strongly with thy hammer, strongly weld it about his hands; make him fast to the rock.

HEPHAESTUS

The work goes on, it is well done.

POWER

Harder strike them, tighter draw the links, leave nothing loose; strange skill he hath to find a way where none appeared.

HEPHAESTUS

One arm is fastened, and none may loose it.

POWER

Fetter the other, make it sure; he shall learn how all his cunning is folly before Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS

Save now my art hath never wrought harm to any.

POWER

Now strongly drive the biting tooth of the adamantine wedge straight through his breast.

HEPHAESTUS

Alas, Prometheus! I groan for thy pangs.

POWER

Dost thou shrink? Wilt thou groan for the foes of Zeus? Take heed, lest thou groan for thyself.

HEPHAESTUS

Thou lookest upon a spectacle grievous to the eye.

POWER

I look upon one suffering as he deserves.—Now about his sides strain tight the girth.

HEPHAESTUS

It must needs be done; yet urge me not overmuch.

POWER

Yet will I urge and harry thee on.—Now lower; with force constrain his legs.

HEPHAESTUS

'Tis even done; nor was the labor long.

POWER

Weld fast the galling fetters; remember that he who appraises is strict to exact.

HEPHAESTUS

Cruel thy tongue, and like thy cruel face.

POWER

Be thine the tender heart! Rebuke not my bolder mood, nor chide my austerity.

HEPHAESTUS

Let us go; now the clinging web binds all his limbs.

(HEPHAESTUS *departs.*)

POWER

There, wanton, in thy insolence! Now for thy creatures of a day filch divine honors. Tell me, will mortal men drain for thee these tortures? Falsely the gods call thee Prometheus, the Contriver, for no cunning contrivance shall help thee to slip from this bondage.

(POWER *and* FORCE *depart.*)

PROMETHEUS (*alone, chanting*)

O air divine, and O swift-wingèd winds!
Ye river fountains, and thou myriad-twinkling
Laughter of ocean waves! O mother earth!
And thou, O all-discerning orb o' the sun!—
To you, I cry to you; behold what I,
A god, endure of evil from the gods.

Behold, with what dread torments
I through the slow-revolving
Ages of time must wrestle;
Such hideous bonds the new lord
Of heaven hath found for my torture.
Woe! woe! for the present disasters
I groan, and for those that shall come;
Nor know I in what far sky
The dawn of deliverance shall rise.

Yet what is this I say? All future things
I see unerring, nor shall any chance
Of evil overtake me unaware.
The will of Destiny we should endure
Lightly as may be, knowing still how vain
To take up arms against Necessity.
Silent I cannot keep, I cannot tongue
These strange calamities. Lo, I am he

Who, darkly hiding in a fennel reed
Fountains of fire, so secretly purloined
And gave to be the teacher of all arts
And giver of all good to mortal men.
And now this forfeit for my sin I pay,
Thus lodged in fetters under the bare sky.

Woe's me!
What murmur hovereth near?
What odor, where visible shape
Is none? Some god, or a mortal,
Or one of the middle race?
Hath he come to this world's-end
Idly to gloat o'er my toils,
Or what would he have?—Behold me
Fettered, the god ill-fated,
The foeman of Zeus, the detested
Of all who enter his courts,
And only because of my love,
My too-great love for mankind.
Ah me! once more the murmur
I hear as of hovering birds;
And the air is whirring with quick
Beating of wings. For me
There is fear, whatever approaches.
(*The* CHORUS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS *enter, drawn in a winged car.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Fear nothing; in friendship and eager
With wingèd contention of speed
Together we draw near thy rock.
Scarce we persuaded our father,
But now at last the swift breezes
Have brought us. Down in the depth
Of our sea-cave came the loud noise
Of the welding of iron; and wonderment
Banished our maiden shame;
All in haste, unsandalled, hither
We flew in this wingèd car.

PROMETHEUS

Ah me! ah me!
O all ye children of Tethys,
Daughters of father Oceanus
Who ever with tide unwearied
Revolveth the whole world round,—
Behold now prisoned in chains
On the dizzy verge of this gorge
Forever I keep sad watch.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

I see, O Prometheus, thy body
In the toils and torture of bondage
Withering here on this rock;
And a mist as of terror, a cloud
Of tears o'erveils my eyes:
New helmsmen guide in the heavens,
And Zeus unlawfully rules
With new laws, and the might of old
He hath banished to uttermost darkness.

PROMETHEUS

Would that me too he had hurled,
Bound in these cruel, unyielding
Bonds, down, down under earth,
Beneath wide Hades, where go
The tribe of innumerable dead,
Down to the infinite depths
Of Tartarus! There no god,
No mortal would gloat o'er my ruin.
Now like a toy of the winds
I hang, my anguish a joy
To my foes.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Who of the gods is so hardened?
To whom is thy sorrow a joy?
Who save only Zeus
But feels the pang of thy torments?
But he, ever savage of soul,
Swayeth the children of heaven;
Nor ever will cease till his heart

Is satiate grown, or another
Snatches the empire by guile.

PROMETHEUS

Ay, and this Lord of the blessed
Shall call in the fulness of time
Upon me whom he tortures in bondage,
Shall implore me to utter the plot
That will rob him of honour and throne.
No sweet-lipped charm of persuasion
Then shall allure me, and never
In cringing fear of his threats
The knowledge will I impart,
Till first he has loosened these bonds,
And for all my anguish he too
Hath humbled his neck unto judgment.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Bold art thou, and calamity
Softens thee not, but ever
Thy thought is quick on thy tongue.
Terror pierceth my heart,
And fearing I ask what shore,
O wanderer tempest-tost,
Far-off of peace shall receive thee!
Stern is the son of Cronos,
And deaf his heart to beseeching.

PROMETHEUS

I know of his hardness, I know
That justice he holds in his palm;
Yet his pride shall be humbled, I think;
His hardness made soft, and his wrath
Shall bow to the blows of adversity;
He, too, in milder mood
Shall come, imploring of me
The friendship I willingly grant.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Unfold to us the whole story. For what crime does Zeus so shamefully and bitterly torture you? Tell us, if there is no harm in telling.

PROMETHEUS

Painful are these things to relate, painful is silence, and all is wretchedness. When first the gods knew wrath, and faction raised its head amongst them, and some would tear old Cronos from his throne that Zeus might take his place, and others were determined that Zeus should never reign over the gods, then I with wise counsel sought to guide the Titans, children of Earth and Sky,—but all in vain. My crafty schemes they disdained, and in their pride of strength thought it were easy to make themselves lords by force. Often to me my mother Themis (or call her Earth, for many names she hath, being one) had foretold in oracles what was to be, with warning that not by might or brutal force should victory come, but by guile alone. So I counselled them, but they turned their eyes from me in impatience. Of the courses which then lay open, far the best, it seemed, was to take my mother as my helper and to join my will with the will of Zeus. By my advice the cavernous gloom of Tartarus now hides in night old Cronos and his peers. Thus the new tyrant of heaven took profit of me, and thus rewards me with these torments. 'Tis the disease of tyranny, no more, to take no heed of friendship. You ask why he tortures me; hear now the reason. No sooner was he established on his father's throne than he began to award various offices to the different gods, ordering his government throughout. Yet no care was in his heart for miserable men, and he was fain to blot out the whole race and in their stead create another. None save me opposed his purpose; I only dared; I rescued mankind from the heavy blow that was to cast them into Hades. Therefore I am bowed down by this anguish, painful to endure, pitiable to behold. Mercy I had for mortals, but found no mercy for myself: so piteously I am disciplined, an ignoble spectacle for Zeus.

LEADER

Fashioned of rock is he, and iron is his heart, O Prometheus, who feels not indignation at thy disasters. Rather would I not have seen them at all, and seeing them I am sore of heart.

PROMETHEUS

To my very friends I am a spectacle of pity.

LEADER

Yet it may be—did thy transgressions end there?

PROMETHEUS

Through me mankind ceased to foresee death.

LEADER

What remedy could heal that sad disease?

PROMETHEUS

Blind hopes I made to dwell in them.

LEADER

O merciful boon for mortals.

PROMETHEUS

And more than all I gave them fire.

LEADER

And so in their brief life they are lords of flaming fire?

PROMETHEUS

Through it they will learn many arts.

LEADER

And was it for crimes like this Zeus—

PROMETHEUS

Tortures me, and ceases not nor relents.

LEADER

And is there no goal to the struggle before thee?

PROMETHEUS

There is none, save when it seems to him good.

LEADER

When shall it so seem? What hope? Seest thou not thy error? That thou hast erred, I say in sorrow and with sorrow to thee. But enough of that; seek thou some release from the conflict.

PROMETHEUS

How easy for one who fares in pleasant ways to admonish those in adversity. But all this I knew; with open eyes, with willing mind, I erred; I do not deny it. Mankind I helped, but could not help myself. Yet I dreamed not that here in this savage solitary gorge, on this high rock, I should waste away beneath such torments. Yet care not to bewail these present disasters; but descend to the earth, and hear of the woes to come and all that is to be. I pray you heed my word; have compassion on one who is now caught in the toils; for sorrow flitteth now to one and now to another, and visiteth each in his turn.

CHORUS (*singing*)

We list to your words, O Prometheus.—
Lo, with light foot I step
From the swift-rushing car; the pure air,

The highway I leave of the birds;
And now to the rugged earth
I descend. I listen, I wait
For thy story of pain and disaster.
(OCEANUS *enters, borne on a winged horse.*)

OCEANUS

To thee I come, O Prometheus;
Borne on this swift-wingèd bird
That knoweth the will of his rider
And needeth no curb, from afar
I have flown a wearisome way,
Weary but ended at last.
I am grieved with thy grief; I am drawn
By our kinship, and even without it
Thee more than all others I honor.
I speak simple sooth, and my tongue
Knows not to flatter in idleness.
Nay, tell me what aid I may render;
For never thy lips shall avow
Oceanus failed thee in friendship.

PROMETHEUS

Ho! What is this I look upon? What then, art thou too come to stare upon my ruin? What new daring has brought thee from thy ocean stream and thy rock-roofed unbuilded caverns hither to our earth, the mother of iron? Art thou come to view my fate with indignation for my calamities? Behold the spectacle! behold me, the friend of Zeus, who helped him to a throne, now bowed down by his torments.

OCEANUS

I see, Prometheus; and, though thou art thyself cunning in device, I would admonish thee to prudence. Learn to know thyself, put on the habit of new ways, for there is a new tyrant among the gods. If still thou hurlest forth these harsh and biting words, perchance from afar off, Zeus, sitting above, may hear thee, and thy present burden of sorrows will seem as the sport of children. But, O wretched sufferer, put away thy moody wrath, and seek some respite from thy ills. My advice may sound as the trite sayings of old, yet thou thyself canst see what are the wages of too bold a tongue. Thou hast not learned humility, nor to yield to evils, but rather wouldst add others new to thy present store. Take me for thy teacher, and kick not against the pricks, for there rules in heaven an austere monarch who is responsible to none. Now I will go and make trial to win thy release from this grievous state. Do thou keep thy peace,

and restrain thy blustering speech. Or knowest thou not in thy wisdom what penalties overtake an idle tongue?

PROMETHEUS

I give you joy that, having shared and dared with me, you have still kept yourself free of blame. I bid you trouble not your peace; his will is immutable and you cannot persuade him. Even beware, lest by your going you bring sorrow upon yourself.

OCEANUS

Thou art wiser to think for others than for thyself, and this I infer from the events. But deter me not from going, for I boast, yes, I may boast, that Zeus will grant me this boon and deliver thee from these toils.

PROMETHEUS

I thank you with gratitude that shall never fail, for you lack nothing in zeal. But trouble not yourself; it is idle, and your care will avail me nothing, despite your zeal. Hold your peace, and keep your foot well from these snares. If I suffer, let me suffer alone. Yet not alone, for I am burdened by the fate of Atlas, my brother. He in the far western ways stands bearing on his shoulders the mighty pillar of earth and sky, a weary burden to hold. And I have seen with pity the earth-born dweller of the Cilician caves, the impetuous, the hundred-headed Typho, when he was bent by force. For he withstood the host of the gods, hissing forth terror from his horrid throats, whilst Gorgonian fires flamed from his eyes, as if to take by violence the very throne of Zeus; but the unsleeping weapon of Zeus fell upon him, the down-rushing thunderbolt with breath of flame, and smote him from his loud-vaunted boastings; and stricken to the heart he was scorched to embers, and thunder rent from him his strength. Now a helpless sprawling bulk he lies near the ocean strait, buried beneath the roots of Aetna; whilst above on the utmost summit Hephaestus welds the molten ore. Thence some day, I ween, shall burst forth rivers of fire to devour with savage maw the wide fields of fair-fruited Sicily,—such wrath shall Typho, scorched by the thunder of Zeus, send up, a tempest, terrible, seething, with breath of flame.—But thou art not untried, and needest not me for a teacher. Save thyself, as thou best knowest how; and leave me to drain this flood of calamity, till the mind of Zeus grows light of its anger.

OCEANUS

Knowest thou not, Prometheus, there are words of healing for a mind distempered?

PROMETHEUS

Ay, if in good time we soothe the heart, nor violently repress its tumid rage.

OCEANUS

In prudent zeal and daring combined, tell me what peril hidden lies.

PROMETHEUS

Labor in vain and vain simplicity.

OCEANUS

Leave me, I prythee, to my mind's disease; for it is well having wisdom not to appear wise.

PROMETHEUS

The folly of thy mission will seem mine.

OCEANUS

It is clear your words dismiss me home.

PROMETHEUS

Your tears for me might win hatred for yourself.

OCEANUS

His hatred you mean, who newly wears the sovereignty?

PROMETHEUS

Ay, his; beware that you vex not his heart.

OCEANUS

Your calamity, Prometheus, is my teacher.

PROMETHEUS

Be gone, take yourself off, keep your present mind.

OCEANUS

I am gone even with your urgent words. See, the winged beast flutters the broad path of the air; gladly would he bend the weary knee in his stall at home.

(OCEANUS *departs as the* CHORUS *begins its song.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

I mourn, O Prometheus, for thee,
I wail for thy hapless fate;
And tears in a melting flood
Flow down from the fount of my eyes,

Drenching my cheeks. O insolent
Laws, O sceptre of Zeus,
How over the gods of old
Ye wield despotic might!

antistrophe 1

Lo, all the land groans aloud;
And the people that dwell in the West
Lament for thy time-honored reign
And the sway of thy kindred, Prometheus;
And they who have builded their homes
In holy Asia to the wail
Of thine anguish lament.

strophe 2

And they
Of the Colchian land, the virgins
Exulting in war; and the Scythians
By the far Maeotian Lake
In the uttermost regions of earth;

antistrophe 2

And the martial flower of Arabia,
Whose battle resounds with the crashing
Of brazen spears, they too
In their citadel reared aloft
Near Caucasus groan for thy fate.

epode

One other, a Titan god,
I have seen in his anguish,
Atlas, the mighty one, bound
In chains adamantine, who still
With groaning upholds on his back
The high-arched vault of the skies.

epode

While ever the surge of the sea
Moans to the sound of his cry,
And the depths of its waters lament;
The fountains of hallowed rivers
Sigh for his anguish in pity;
While from its dark abyss
The unseen world far below
Mutters and rumbles in concert.

PROMETHEUS

Think not I am silent through pride or insolence; dumb rage gnaws at my very heart for this outrage upon me. Yet who but I established these new gods in their honours? But I speak not of this, for already you are aware of the truth. Rather listen to the sad story of mankind, who like children lived until I gave them understanding and a portion of reason; yet not in disparagement of men I speak, but meaning to set forth the greatness of my charity. For seeing they saw not, and hearing they understood not, but like as shapes in a dream they wrought all the days of their life in confusion. No houses of brick raised in the warmth of the sun they had, nor fabrics of wood, but like the little ants they dwelt underground in the sunless depth of caverns. No certain sign of approaching winter they knew, no harbinger of flowering spring or fruitful summer; ever they labored at random, till I taught them to discern the seasons by the rising and the obscure setting of the stars. Numbers I invented for them, the chiefest of all discoveries; I taught them the grouping of letters, to be a memorial and record of the past, the mistress of the arts and mother of the Muses. I first brought under the yoke beasts of burden, who by draft and carrying relieved men of their hardest labors; I yoked the proud horse to the chariot, teaching him obedience to the reins, to be the adornment of wealth and luxury. I too contrived for sailors sea-faring vessels with their flaxen wings. Alas for me! such inventions I devised for mankind, but for myself I have no cunning to escape disaster.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Sorrow and humiliation are your portion: you have failed in understanding and gone astray; and like a poor physician falling into sickness you despond and know not the remedies for your own disease.

PROMETHEUS

Hear but the rest, and you will wonder more at my inventions and many arts. If sickness visited them, they had no healing drug, no salve or soothing potion, but wasted away for want of remedies, and this was my greatest boon; for I revealed to them the mingling of bland medicaments for the banishing of all diseases. And many modes of divination I appointed: from dreams I first taught them to judge what should befall in waking state; I found the subtle interpretation of words half heard or heard by chance, and of meetings by the way; and the flight of taloned birds with their promise of fortune or failure I clearly denoted, their various modes of life, their mutual feuds, their friendships and consortings; I taught men to observe the smooth plumpness of entrails, and the color of the gall pleasing to the gods, and the mottled symmetry of liver-lobe. Burning the thigh-bones wrapt in fat and the long chine, I guided mankind to a hidden art, and read to them the intimations of the altar-flames

that before were meaningless. So much then for these inventions. And the secret treasures of the earth, all benefits to men, copper, iron, silver, gold,—who but I could boast their discovery? No one, I ween, unless in idle vaunting. Nay, hear the whole matter in a word,—all human arts are from Prometheus.

LEADER

Care not for mortals overmuch, whilst you neglect your own profit. Indeed, I am of good hope that yet some day, freed from bondage, you shall equal the might of Zeus.

PROMETHEUS

Not yet hath all-ordaining Destiny decreed my release; but after many years, broken by a world of disaster and woe, I shall be delivered. The craft of the forger is weaker far than Necessity.

LEADER

Who then holds the helm of Necessity?

PROMETHEUS

The Fates triform and the unforgetting Furies.

LEADER

And Zeus, is he less in power than these?

PROMETHEUS

He may not avoid what is destined.

LEADER

What is destined for Zeus but endless rule?

PROMETHEUS

Ask not, neither set thy heart on knowing.

LEADER

Some solemn secret thou wouldst clothe in mystery.

PROMETHEUS

Speak no more of it; the time is not yet to divulge it, and the secret must still be deeply shrouded. Harbouring this I shall one day escape from this outrage and ignominy of bondage.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

May never Zeus, the all-wielder,
Against my feeble will

Set his strength; nor ever may I
By the stanchless flood of my father,
By the shores of Oceanus, cease
With hallowed offering of oxen
To worship the gods. May never
My tongue give offence, but always
This purpose abide in my soul.

antistrophe 1

Ah, sweet to prolong our days
In the courage of hope, and sweet
With ever dawning delights
To nourish the heart. I shudder,
Prometheus, for thee, for thy weight
Of myriad-pilèd woe;
Ay, fearing not Zeus, in self-will
Too much thou honourest mortals;

strophe 2

For thankless thy favor, O friend:
And where is the valour, what help
From men who appear and are gone?
Their weakness hast thou not discovered,
Their feeble blindness wherein
Like dreaming shadows they move?
Never their counsels shall break
Through the harmony ordered of Zeus.

antistrophe 2

I too have pondered this wisdom,
Beholding thy terrible ruin,
Prometheus. Ah me, for the change!
With what other notes I chanted
Thy bridal song, the shrill
Hymenean strains at the bath
And the couch, on the happy day
When our sister Hesione, won
By thy bounty, entered thy home!

(Io *enters, transformed in part to a heifer, followed by the Spectre of* Argus. *She is in a half-frenzied state.*)

Io (*chanting*)
What land have I reached? what people?
Who is this I behold in chains

On this storm-riven rock? What crime
Hath brought thee to perishing thus?
Ah whither, to what far regions
Hath misery borne me? Ah me!
Once more I am stung by the gadfly,
Pursued by the wraith of dead Argus.
Save me, O Earth! Once more
In my terror I see him, the watcher;
He is there, and his myriad eyes
Are upon me. Shall earth nevermore
Conceal her buried dead?
He hath come from the pit to pursue me,
He drives me weary and famished
Over the long sea sands;
And ever his shrill scrannel pipe,
Waxen-jointed, is droning forth
A slumberous strain.

Alas!
To what land far-off have I wandered?
What error, O Zeus, what crime
Is mine that thus I am yoked
Unto misery? Why am I stung
With frenzy that drives me unresting
Forever? Let fires consume me;
Let the deep earth yawning engulf me;
Or the monstrous brood of the sea
Devour; but O great King,
Hark to my pleading for respite!
I have wandered enough, I am weary,
And still I discern no repose.—
(*To* PROMETHEUS)
And thou, hast thou heard me, the virgin
Wearing these horns of a heifer?

PROMETHEUS
I hear the frenzied child of Inachus,
The maiden who with love could all inflame
Great Zeus's heart, and now by Hera's hate
Forever flees before this stinging pest.

Io (*chanting*)
Thou knowest my father then?
And who, I prythee, art thou

That callest me thus by name,
Oh name most wretched! and tellest
The wasting plague heaven-sent
And the pest with its haunting sting?
Ah me! behold I am come
With leapings of madness, by hunger
And craving impelled, and subdued
By the crafty anger of Hera.
Who in this world of calamity,
Who suffers as I?—But thou,
If thou canst, declare what awaits me
Of sorrow; what healing balm
I may find. Speak thou, I implore thee,
I, the wandering virgin of sorrows.

PROMETHEUS

Clearly I will set forth all you would learn; speaking not in dark riddles, but in full simplicity, as speech is due between friends. Behold, I whom you see am Prometheus, the giver of fire to mankind.

IO

You who appeared to men with all-sufficient bounty,—tell me why are you, O enduring Prometheus, given over to chastisement?

PROMETHEUS

But now I have ceased bewailing these calamities.

IO

And will you deny me this simple boon?

PROMETHEUS

What do you ask? You may learn all from me.

IO

Declare who chained you to this rocky gorge.

PROMETHEUS

The will of Zeus, but Hephaestus' hand.

IO

For what crimes are you punished thus?

PROMETHEUS

I have told you enough; ask no more.

Io

One further boon: what term shall end my wanderings? what time is ordained for my peace?

Prometheus

Better for you not to know than to know.

Io

Yet hide not what remains for me to endure.

Prometheus

So much alone I am willing to grant.

Io

Why then do you delay? I would know all.

Prometheus

It is not churlishness; I am loth to bruise your heart.

Io

Spare me not further than I myself desire.

Prometheus

Since you so crave, it is well; hear me then.

Leader of the Chorus

Nay, not yet. Grant me also a share in your grace. Let us first hear from her the story of her sorrow and the disasters that prey on her life. Then do you declare to her what struggle still remains.

Prometheus

'Tis for thee, Io, to bestow this favor; and fittingly, for these are thy father's sisters. Time is not lost, I deem, in bewailing and mourning our fate when answering tears stand ready in the listener's eye.

Io

Hard would it be to disregard your wish;
And if my words have credit in your ears
The tale is rendered. Yet as one who speaks
And still laments, my sorrows I recount,—
How wild, perturbing wonders in my soul
Wrought by the will of heaven, and how in shape
This bestial transformation I endured.
For always in the drowsy hours of night
I, sleeping in my virgin chambers, saw
Strange visitations pass, and as they passed

Each smiled and whispered: O sweet-favored girl,
Why cherish long thy maiden loneliness,
When love celestial calleth? Fair art thou,
And thronèd Zeus, heart-smitten with desire,
Yearns from his heaven to woo thee. Nay, sweet child,
Disdain him not. Now to the meadow land
Of Lerna, where thy father's pastures lie
And the sleek cattle browse, do thou steal forth
Alone, and haply there thy yielding grace
May soothe the passion in the Sovereign's eye.—
Such dreams, filling with fear the hours of sleep,
Drove me at last to tell my father all.
And he was troubled; many times in doubt
To Pythian Delphi and the speaking oaks
Of far Dodona messengers he sent,
Inquiring by what act or pleasing word
The grace of heaven to win. But ever these
With oracles of shifting speech returned,
Inexplicably dark. Yet in the end
Came one clear cruel utterance, oh, too clear!
That bade him drive me forth from home and land,
An exile doomed in solitary ways
To wander to the confines of the world.
With such commands came words of dreadful import,
And threats of flaming thunderbolts from Zeus
With burning wrath to desolate his race,
If he durst disobey. Much doubted he,
But at the last Apollo's warning voice
And Zeus's curb upon his soul prevailed:
He drave me forth, and all my life's young joy
Ended in bitter grief for him and me.
Straightway my form this strange distortion knew,
With horns here on my front; and madly stung
By this insatiate fly, with antic bounds
I sped away to the sweet-flowing fount
Of Cenchreae and the Lernéan well;
While close upon me Argus, born of earth,
Savage and sleepless trailed, his wakeful eyes
Fixed on my track. And though a sudden fate
Him overmastered, yet this stinging fly
Still with his lash pursues from land to land.—
Such is my tale; and now if in thy wit
It lies to prophesy what toils remain,

So say, nor by false pitying speech misguide;
For glozing words I deem the worst disease.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh strange! Oh, more than incredible!
Never I thought such words
Surpassing the wildest belief
Should enter my ears, such a tale
Of horror and woe and calamity.
I am stung to the soul, and compassion
Benumbs my heart. O Fate!
Alas, O Fate! I shudder
Beholding the lot of this maiden.

PROMETHEUS

You are quick to lament and very prone to fear. Yet wait a little till you have heard what remains.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Speak, tell us all; to the sick it is sweet to know betimes what awaits them of pain.

PROMETHEUS

Lightly I granted your former request, for you desired first to hear from her lips the story of her conflict; hear now the evils that Hera hath still in store for this maiden;—and do you, O daughter of Inachus, take my words to your heart that you may know the goal of your wanderings. —Turn first toward the rising sun, and thitherward proceeding over unploughed fields you will reach the nomad Scythians, a people of mighty archers, who in their wicker-woven houses dwell aloft on smooth-rolling wagons. Approach not these, but pass on through the land, keeping ever near to the surf-beaten shores of the Euxine. To the left dwell the Chalybes, famous workers of iron; and of them you must beware, for they are a savage race and regard not strangers. Then will you come to the River of Violence, fierce as its name and treacherous to ford; cross not over it until you have reached the Caucasus, highest of mountains, where the river pours out its fury over the brows of the cliffs. Here over the star-neighboring summits you must toil and turn to the southern path: so in time you will reach the host of the Amazons, ever hostile to men, who one day shall inhabit Themiscyra on the Thermodon, where Salmydessus opens upon the sea her ravenous jaws, a terror to strange sailors, a cruel step-dame to ships. Gladly the Amazons will guide thee on thy way. And thou wilt come to the Cimmerian isthmus by the narrow gateway of the lake; and leaving this with brave heart thou wilt cross over the Maeotic

strait, which ever after in memorial of thy crossing men shall call the Bosporus, the fording of the heifer. Thus thou wilt abandon the plain of Europe and venture on the continent of Asia.—Now doth not the tyrant of the gods seem to you altogether violent? Behold how this god, desiring to mingle with a mortal woman, hath imposed on her these wanderings.—Thou hast met, O maiden, a bitter claimant for thy favor; and the words thou hast heard are not even the prelude to what must follow.

Io

Alas, for me!

Prometheus

Once more you cry out and groan; what will you do when you have learned the troubles that remain?

Leader

Nay, have you calamities still to recount?

Prometheus

As it were a stormy sea of lamentable woe.

Io

What profit have I in life? Why do I not hurl myself out of hand from this rude precipice, that broken on the plain below I may have speedy respite from my troubles? It were better to die once for all than to drag out my lingering days in anguish.

Prometheus

How hardly would you endure my struggles, for death that would release me from my woes is denied me by Destiny. Now there is no goal before me of my conflict until Zeus is thrown from his supremacy.

Io

And shall Zeus ever fall from power?

Prometheus

You would rejoice, I think, to see his overthrow.

Io

Why should I not, who am abused by Zeus?

Prometheus

You may learn from me that your wish is truth.

Io

Who shall despoil him of the tyrant's sceptre?

PROMETHEUS
He shall himself despoil by his own folly.

Io
How may it be? Speak, if there is no harm.

PROMETHEUS
An ill-fated espousal shall work him grief.

Io
A spouse divine or human? tell if thou mayst.

PROMETHEUS
What is it to thee? I may not speak her name.

Io
His bride shall drag him from the throne?

PROMETHEUS
A son she shall bear, mightier than his father.[1]

Io
Hath he no refuge from this doom?

PROMETHEUS
There is none, except I be loosed from my bonds.

Io
Who is to loose thee against the will of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS
Thy own children's child must do the deed.[2]

Io
What sayest thou? my son shall end thy evils?

PROMETHEUS
The third after the tenth generation.

Io
Thy oracle is dark to my understanding.

PROMETHEUS
Pass it by; thy own ill fate is involved therein.

Io
The boon is offered, and straightway thou withdrawest it.

PROMETHEUS

I grant thee the knowledge of either of two desires

IO

Tell me the twain, and let me choose.

PROMETHEUS

'Tis done; choose whether I tell thee plainly of thy coming tribulations or of him who is to deliver me.

LEADER

Yet rather bestow the one favor on her and the other on me, and be not chary of your words. To her set forth her future wanderings, and to me your deliverer, as I long to hear.

PROMETHEUS

Your eagerness compels me, and I will relate all you ask. To you first, Io, I will proclaim trials of wandering, and do you record them on the tablets of your brain.—When [8] you have crossed the tide that bounds two continents, then toward the flaming sun-trodden regions of the dawn pass on beyond the surge of the sea till you reach the Gorgonean plains of Cisthene, the home of the Graeae, the three daughters of Phorcys, ancient virgins, possessing among them but one eye and one tooth, upon whom neither the sun looks down with his beams, nor ever the moon by night. And near by are the three other sisters, the winged, snake-haired, man-hating Gorgons, upon whom no mortal may look and live. Such wardens guard that land. Yet hear another spectacle of dread: beware the sharp-beaked hounds of Zeus that never bark, the griffins, and beware the one-eyed Arimaspian host of riders who dwell by the gold-washing tide of Pluto's stream; approach them not. And you will come to a far-off land, a swarthy people, who live by the fountain of the sun and Aethiopia's river. Follow its banks until you arrive at the Cataract where from the Bybline hills the Nile pours out its waters sweet and worshipful. This stream will guide you to the great Nilotic delta, where at the last fate bids you and your children, Io, establish your far-off home. Now if my speech seems stammering and hard to understand, still question me and be advised; for there is more leisure to me than I could wish.

CHORUS

If anything remains untold of her life of weary wanderings, now recount it to her, but if all is said, then grant us the favor we beg. You have not forgotten it.

PROMETHEUS

She has heard her journeyings to the end; yet that she may know my words are not spoken in vain, I will relate her toils before coming hither, and this shall be a witness to the truth of my prophecy. I will pass over the greater part of the tale, and come to the end of your wanderings. For thus you came at last to the Molossian plains and Dodona with its lofty ridges, where is the oracle and home of Thesprotian Zeus and that strange portent of the talking oaks which in language clear and void of riddles addressed you as the renowned future spouse of Zeus, and the memory of this must still speak in your breast. From thence, urged on by frenzy, you rushed by the sea-shore path to the great gulf of Rhea, and back returned like a vessel tempest-tost from port. Now no longer the gulf shall be known by its old name, but shall be called the Ionian Sea, as a memorial to all men of your journeying. This knowledge is a sign to you of my understanding, that it discerns more than meets the eye.—The rest I tell to you, daughters of Oceanus, and to her together, returning again to the track of my former tale. There is a city, Canobus, standing on the verge of the land at the very mouth and silted bar of the Nile, where at the last Zeus shall restore you to your mind with but the stroke and gentle touching of his hand. There you shall bear a child to Zeus, the swarthy Epaphus, "Touch-born," who shall gather as lord the fruit of all the valley of the broad-flowing Nile. The fourth generation after him,[4] a band of fifty sisters shall return perforce to Argos, to flee the courtship of their fifty cousins. And these, like hawks that follow hard upon a flock of doves, shall pursue the maidens, seeking marriage ill to seek, for God shall grudge them the sweet pleasure of that love. In the Pelasgian land the maidens shall find a home, when in the watches of the night with deed of murderous revenge they, women as they are, have slain their suitors, each plunging her deadly blade into her new lord's throat—so might the Queen of Love appear to my foes! Yet longing shall soothe one maiden's heart to spare her fellow, and blunt the edge of her resolve, for of the twain it will please her rather to be called timid than bloodthirsty. And from her a royal race shall spring in Argos—time fails to tell the whole—and a mighty man of valor, renowned with the bow, who shall deliver me from these toils. All this my ancient mother, the Titan Themis, foretold to me in an oracle; but how it shall come to pass needs yet many words to relate, and the hearing would profit you nothing.

IO (*chanting*)

Eleleu! eleleu!
Once more the spasm, the madness
Smiteth my brain as a fire.
I am stung by the pest, I am pierced

With a dart never forged in the fire;
My seated heart at my ribs
Doth knock, and my straining eyes
Revolve in their orbs; I am borne
As a vessel is lashed by the tempest;
My tongue hath broke its control,
And my turbid words beat madly
In billows of horror and woe.

(Io *departs, as the* CHORUS *begins its song.*)

CHORUS

strophe

Wise among mortals I count him
Who weighed this truth in his mind
And divulged it: better the union
Of equal with equal in wedlock.
How shall the toiler, the craftsman,
Be lifted in idle desire
To mate with the glory of wealth
Or the honor of noble descent?

antistrophe

Never, O kindly powers,
Behold me the partner of Zeus;
Never may one of the gods
Descend from the skies for my love.
Horror sufficient I feel
For Io, the virgin, the outcast,
Who hateth her lord and is driven
By Hera to wander forlorn.

epode

Wedlock if equal I fear not;
But oh! may never a god
With love's irresistible glance
Constrain me! Hard were the battle,
For who were I to resist him?
What way of escape would remain
From the counsel and purpose of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS

Yet shall Zeus himself, the stubborn of soul, be humbled, for the union he purposes in his heart shall hurl him to outer darkness from his throne of supremacy. Then at last the curse of his father Cronos shall be ful-

filled to the uttermost, the curse that he swore when thrown from his ancient seat. All this I know and how the curse shall work, and I only of the gods may point out a refuge from these disasters. Therefore let him sit boldly now, trusting in his thunders that reverberate through the sky, and wielding fiery darts in his hands; they shall avail him naught nor save him from falling in ruin unendurable. A mighty wrestler he is preparing against himself, an irresistible champion, who shall search out a fire more terrible than his lightning and a roaring noise to drown his thunder, and who shall break in pieces that sea-scourge and shaker of the earth, the trident-spear of Poseidon. And Zeus, broken on this rock, shall learn how far apart it is to rule and be a slave.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thy bodings against Zeus are but thy own desire.

PROMETHEUS

I speak what is to be, and that is my desire.

LEADER

Must we look for one to reign above Zeus?

PROMETHEUS

Troubles more grievous to bear shall bow his neck.

LEADER

Thou tremblest not to utter such words?

PROMETHEUS

Why should I tremble whose fate is not to die?

LEADER

Yet he might still harder torments inflict.

PROMETHEUS

So let him; I am prepared for all.

LEADER

Yet the wise bow down to Nemesis.

PROMETHEUS

So worship, flatter, adore the ruler of the day; but I have no thought in my heart for Zeus. Let him act, let him reign his little while as he will; for he shall not long rule over the gods.—(HERMES *enters.*) But I see here the lackey of Zeus, the servant of the new tyrant. No doubt he has come with tidings of some new device.

HERMES

Thee, the wise, the bitter beyond bitterness, the thief of fire, who hast revolted against the gods and betrayed their honours to thy creatures of a day,—to thee I speak. The father bids thee declare the chance of wedlock thou vauntest, that shall bereave him of his sceptre; and this thou art to state clearly and not involve thy speech in riddles. Put me not, O Prometheus, to double my journey; thou seest that Zeus is not appeased by dubious words.

PROMETHEUS

Haughty thy speech and swollen with pride, as becomes a servant of the gods. Ye are but young in tyranny, and think to inhabit a citadel unassaulted of grief; yet have I not seen two tyrants fall therefrom? And third I shall behold this present lord cast down in utter ruin. Do I seem to cower and quail before these new gods? Hardly, I think; there is no fear in me. But do you trudge back the road you came; for all your pains of asking are in vain.

HERMES

Yet forget not such insolence has brought you to this pass of evil.

PROMETHEUS

Be assured I would not barter my hard lot for your menial service.

HERMES

It is better no doubt to serve this rock than to be the trusted herald of Zeus.

PROMETHEUS

I but answered insult with insult.

HERMES

You seem to glory in your present state.

PROMETHEUS

What, I? So might I see my enemies glory,—and you among them!

HERMES

You blame me too for your calamities?

PROMETHEUS

In simple sooth I count all the gods my foes, who requited my benefits with injuries.

HERMES

Your madness I see is a deep-rooted disease.

PROMETHEUS

If hatred of foes is madness, I am mad.

HERMES

Who could endure you in prosperity!

PROMETHEUS

Alas, prosperity!

HERMES

Zeus has not learned that cry, alas.

PROMETHEUS

Time, growing ever older, teaches all things.

HERMES

It has not taught you wisdom yet.

PROMETHEUS

Else I should hardly talk with you, a slave.

HERMES

It seems you will not answer the father's demands.

PROMETHEUS

My debt of gratitude I fain would pay.

HERMES

You have reviled and scorned me as a child.

PROMETHEUS (*in supreme anger*)

And are you not simpler than a child if you hope to learn aught from me? There is no torment or contrivance in the power of Zeus to wring this utterance from me, except these bonds are loosened. Therefore let him hurl upon me the red levin, let him confound the reeling world with tempest of white-feathered snow and subterranean thunders; none of these things shall extort from me the knowledge that may ward off his overthrow.

HERMES

Consider if you shall profit by this.

PROMETHEUS

I have considered long since and formed my plan.

HERMES

Yet subdue thyself in time, rash fool, to regard thy present ills in wisdom.[5]

PROMETHEUS

You vex me to no purpose, as one might waste his words on a wave of the sea. Dream not that ever in fear of Zeus's will I shall grow woman-hearted, and raise my supine hands in supplication to my hated foe for deliverance from these bonds;—it is not in my nature.

HERMES

Though I speak much, my words will all be wasted; my appeals have no power to soften and appease your heart, but champing the bit like a new-yoked colt you are restive and struggle against the reins. There is no strength of wisdom in your savage mood, for mere self-will in a foolish man avails nothing. And consider, if thou disregard my words, what a tempest of evils, wave on wave inevitable, shall break upon thee; for first the father will smite this rugged cliff with rending of thunder and hurtling fires, and in its harsh and rock-ribbed embrace enfold thy hidden body. Then after a weary age of years once more thou shalt come forth to the light; and the winged hound of Zeus, the ravening eagle, with savage greed shall tear the mighty ruin of thy limbs, feasting all day an uninvited guest, and glutting his maw on thy black-gnawed liver. Neither look for any respite from this agony, unless some god shall appear as a voluntary successor to thy toils, and of his own free will goeth down to sunless Hades and the dark depths of Tartarus. Therefore take heed; for my words are not vain boasting, but all too truly spoken. The lips of Zeus know not to utter falsehood, but all that he saith he will accomplish. Do thou consider and reflect, and regard not vaunting pride as better than wise counsel.

LEADER

To us Hermes seems to utter words not untimely; for he admonishes you to abandon vaunting pride and seek for wise counsel. Obey him; it is shameful for a wise man to go astray.

PROMETHEUS (*chanting*)

All this ere he uttered his message
I knew; yet feel no dishonor
In suffering wrong from a foe.
Ay, let the lightning be launched
With curled and forkèd flame
On my head; let the air confounded
Shudder with thunderous peals
And convulsion of raging winds;
Let tempests beat on the earth
Till her rooted foundations tremble;
The boisterous surge of the sea

Leap up to mingle its crest
With the stars eclipsed in their orbs;
Let the whirling blasts of Necessity
Seize on my body and hurl it
Down to the darkness of Tartarus,—
Yet all he shall not destroy me!

HERMES

I hear the delirious cries
Of a mind unhinged; his prayer
Is frenzy, and all that he doth.—
But ye who condole with his anguish,
Be quick, I implore, and depart,
Ere the deafening roar of the thunder
Daze and bewilder your senses.

CHORUS

Waste not thy breath in vain warnings,
Nor utter a word unendurable;
For who art thou in the pathway
Of evil and falsehood to guide me?
Better I deem it to suffer
Whate'er he endures; for traitors
My soul abhorreth, their shame
I spew from my heart as a pest.

HERMES

Yet remember my counsel in season,
And blame not your fortune when caught
In the snare of Disaster, nor cry
Unto Zeus that he throws you unwarned
Into sorrow. Yourselves take the blame;
Foretaught and with eyes unveiled
You walk to be snared in the vast
And implicate net of Disaster.

(HERMES *goes out. A storm bursts, with thunder and lightning. The rocks are sundered;* PROMETHEUS *slowly sinks from sight, while the* CHORUS *scatters to right and left.*)

PROMETHEUS

Lo, in grim earnest the world
Is shaken, the roar of thunders
Reverberates, gleams the red levin,

And whirlwinds lick up the dust.
All the blasts of the winds leap out
And meet in tumultuous conflict,
Confounding the sea and the heavens.
'Tis Zeus who driveth his furies
To smite me with terror and madness.
O mother Earth all-honored,
O Air revolving thy light
A common boon unto all,
Behold what wrongs I endure.

NOTES FOR PROMETHEUS BOUND

THE translation of Paul Elmer More, author of the *Shelburne Essays* and *The Greek Tradition,* was first published in 1899. The present text contains corrections and revisions made by the translator in his own personal copy which was turned over to the editors. More's scheme of translation, which is similar in some respects to that of Richard Aldington in his version of Euripides' *Alcestis,* and to that of R. C. Trevelyan in his version of Sophocles' *Ajax,* may perhaps best be described in a short quotation from his introduction. In speaking of the Chorus, More says: "Their song and the lyric parts throughout I have turned into semi-poetic language to mark them off to the eye at least from the regular dialogue, which in the original is in a metre akin to our blank verse and is here translated into prose." Certain choral passages in Greek tragedy rendered into short lines of English verse, skilfully composed, seem to preserve with peculiar effectiveness the austerity and dignity of the original.

1. The reference is to the son which Thetis will bear if she consummates her marriage with Zeus. This secret knowledge constitutes Prometheus' only defence against Zeus.

2. This refers to Heracles.

3. The highly imaginative geography of the following speeches evidently afforded great pleasure to the Greek audiences.

4. For the story of the Danaids, cf. Aeschylus, *The Suppliants,* and its introduction.

5. Hermes here virtually identifies wisdom with prudent self-interest.

V

AGAMEMNON

Characters in the Play

A Watchman
Chorus of Argive Elders
Clytemnestra, *wife of* Agamemnon
A Herald
Agamemnon, *King of Argos*
Cassandra, *daughter of Priam, and slave of* Agamemnon
Aegisthus, *son of Thyestes, cousin of* Agamemnon
Servants, Attendants, Soldiers

INTRODUCTION

The trilogy *Oresteia:* *Agamemnon, The Choephori,* and *The Eumenides*

THE only trilogy in Greek tragedy which has come down to us complete is the so-called *Oresteia,* made up of the three plays, *Agamemnon, The Choephori,* and *The Eumenides.* Each individual play therefore must be regarded as a single large act of the whole tragedy. The trilogy is in all probability the last work which Aeschylus composed, and won the first prize in the tragic contest held in 458 B.C. There can be little question that it is Aeschylus' masterpiece and it deservedly holds its position at the forefront of Greek tragedy along with the great Oedipus plays of Sophocles.

In the *Oresteia* Aeschylus studies again a curse upon a house. This time he turns to the legends of the House of Atreus which told how Atreus and Thyestes, sons of Pelops, became enemies, how Thyestes wronged Atreus' wife, how Atreus in revenge slew Thyestes' children, and served them to him in a ghastly banquet. The curse came into being as a result of these horrible crimes. Such was the inheritance of Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus. However, all went well with them until Helen, the wife of Menelaus, and reputedly the fairest of women in the world, deserted her husband to go with Paris to Troy. Then, at his brother's request, Agamemnon, the most powerful king in all Greece, marshalled a great Grecian host to invade the Troad and to regain Helen. The expedition assembled at Aulis, but the hostility of Artemis caused contrary winds to blow, and dissension and discontent arose among the Greeks, who were impatient to depart. Calchas, the seer to whom an appeal was made, announced that the expedition could sail only on condition that Agamemnon appease the wrath of Artemis by sacrificing his daughter, Iphigenia. Agamemnon, after a period of inner struggle, finally gave way, the maiden was sacrificed, and the host embarked. After ten years Troy fell, and the various Greek leaders began their journeys home.

The *Agamemnon* opens at this point. The scene is laid at Argos, where

the queen, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, has not yet heard that the Greeks have captured Troy. Clytemnestra, in the king's absence and in anger at the loss of her daughter, Iphigenia, has taken as her lover, Aegisthus, Thyestes' sole surviving son, who is burning with a desire to revenge himself upon Agamemnon. The queen and her paramour have carefully laid a plot to murder the king upon his return. The events in the first play of the trilogy are the arrival of the news of Troy's capture, Agamemnon's homecoming and his subsequent murder. The second play, *The Choephori,* tells how Electra and Orestes, daughter and son of Agamemnon, slew their mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, to avenge their father's death. The third play, *The Eumenides,* records how Orestes, driven by the Furies, who are quasi-symbols of conscience, ultimately was absolved of his guilt, and how the curse finally ceased to operate.

The *Agamemnon,* taken by itself, contains two or three aspects worthy of special consideration. The first is the masterly fashion in which Aeschylus has drawn the character of Clytemnestra. With sure hand, he reveals the tense psychological strain under which she is labouring, her adamantine calm as she first greets her husband, her wild triumph after the murder, when she glories in her deed, and her final exhausted reaction at the close of the play. Secondly, Agamemnon's entrance provides a scene which illustrates better than any other in Greek tragedy how a playwright can exploit the possibilities of "spectacle," to use Aristotle's designation in his *Poetics* for this aspect of tragedy. Not only is Agamemnon's triumphal entry at the head of a great procession spectacular, but likewise the appeal is to the eye when at the centre of the scene is spread a carpet of deep crimson (or "purple," as it is translated by Morshead), upon which Agamemnon is to walk to his doom. Aeschylus has here used color symbolically with great effect. And finally, the so-called Cassandra scene is perhaps as intense dramatically as any in the literature of the theatre. As Agamemnon's concubine and his chief spoil of the war, Cassandra follows him on the scene, remains motionless and silent until finally, after Agamemnon and Clytemnestra have entered the palace, she breaks into her half-crazed lament and prophecy, which none can believe. The variation in cadence and emotional tension of her lines in the scene account largely for its effectiveness.

The Choephori takes its name from the Chorus of "Libation-Bearers" who have accompanied Electra to the tomb of Agamemnon in the opening scene. Considered by itself the play gains added interest for students of Greek tragedy because both Sophocles in his *Electra* and Euripides in his *Electra* have dealt with the same subject-matter. Particularly noteworthy in the play is the long *commos* or lyric passage sung by Electra, Orestes, and the Chorus during which the will of Orestes is steeled for the act of slaying his mother. Equally effective is Orestes' final speech

during which the Furies first appear to him and the fabric of his reason begins to give way.

Viewed as a self-contained dramatic unit, *The Eumenides,* so called from the designation given to the Chorus after they have been transformed into Goddesses of Grace, has one individual feature worthy of mention. This is the scene in which Orestes is put on trial for his matricide. Athena creates a court of Athenians who will be competent to judge not only Orestes but also all similar offenders in the future. In this way Aeschylus accounts for the origin of the much-revered Athenian court of the Areopagus. Such ventures in aetiology undoubtedly had a popular appeal for the Athenian audience, and served to make more immediate a drama so largely devoted to mythological or legendary material.

The points already touched upon have not been directly involved with the central import of the trilogy as a whole. It has already been stated that Aeschylus is studying the phenomenon of an ancestral curse. Here is the House of Atreus. Atreus and Thyestes sin. Agamemnon sins in his turn. He is murdered, and his murder begets another. When will the chain of crime cease? It seems undeniable that Aeschylus is focussing his attention upon this aspect of the problem of evil. Furthermore, Aeschylus attacks the question from the point of view of a monotheistic theology. The great opening choral ode of the *Agamemnon* makes this fact abundantly clear. A lofty theological tone is set for the whole trilogy, when the poet writes, p. 172,

> Zeus—if to the Unknown
> That name of many names seem good—
> Zeus, upon thee I call.
> Thro' the mind's every road
> I passed, but vain are all,
> Save that which names thee Zeus, the Highest One,
> Were it but mine to cast away the load,
> The weary load, that weighs my spirit down.
> . . . . . .
> 'Tis Zeus alone who shows the perfect way
> Of knowledge: He hath ruled,
> Men shall learn wisdom, by affliction schooled.

God has ruled that man shall learn by suffering, such is the initial interpretation of the problem offered by Aeschylus at the outset of his drama. The tone continues in the other choral passages of the *Agamemnon,* though the interpretation tends to verge upon the theory that God's justice and his punishments are based upon the principle of "an eye for an eye." But in *The Eumenides* Orestes is acquitted and not for very

logically convincing reasons, and with him justice seems to have been tempered with mercy. Orestes leaves the scene almost immediately, but the play continues, and it is in this closing passage that Aeschylus gives the final resolution to his problem. There are no human characters left, which suggests the idea that Aeschylus has used his human story merely to provide illustrative material for his analysis of the central issue. The Furies, who in their choral songs throughout the play have expressed themselves as uncompromising instruments of Fate and of divine vengeance—"an eye for an eye"—are won over by Athena, and mysteriously and mystically become Goddesses of Mercy. Aeschylus' resolution then is mystical and in a strange sense supra-rational. Its power is like in kind to and of the same order as that in the *Book of Job* when the Voice from the Whirlwind speaks. At the end of the *Oresteia* Aeschylus gives us a conception of a godhead which is at once merciful and just, in which both "Zeus" and "Fate" are fused, through whose wisdom man by suffering can achieve wisdom.[1]

[1] A. W. Verrall in the introduction to his text of *The Eumenides* has developed at some length this interpretation of the play's conclusion.

AGAMEMNON

(SCENE:—*Before the palace of* AGAMEMNON *in Argos. In front of the palace there are statues of the gods, and altars prepared for sacrifice. It is night. On the roof of the palace can be discerned a* WATCHMAN.)

WATCHMAN

I PRAY the gods to quit me of my toils,
To close the watch I keep, this livelong year;
For as a watch-dog lying, not at rest,
Propped on one arm, upon the palace-roof
Of Atreus' race, too long, too well I know
The starry conclave of the midnight sky,
Too well, the splendours of the firmament,
The lords of light, whose kingly aspect shows—
What time they set or climb the sky in turn—
The year's divisions, bringing frost or fire.

And now, as ever, am I set to mark
When shall stream up the glow of signal-flame,
The bale-fire bright, and tell its Trojan tale—
Troy town is ta'en: such issue holds in hope
She in whose woman's breast beats heart of man.[1]

Thus upon mine unrestful couch I lie,
Bathed with the dews of night, unvisited
By dreams—ah me!—for in the place of sleep
Stands Fear as my familiar, and repels
The soft repose that would mine eyelids seal.

And if at whiles, for the lost balm of sleep,
I medicine my soul with melody
Of trill or song—anon to tears I turn,
Wailing the woe that broods upon this home,
Not now by honour guided as of old.

But now at last fair fall the welcome hour
That sets me free, whene'er the thick night glow
With beacon-fire of hope deferred no more.
All hail!
(*A beacon-light is seen reddening the distant sky.*)
Fire of the night, that brings my spirit day,
Shedding on Argos light, and dance, and song,
Greetings to fortune, hail!

Let my loud summons ring within the ears
Of Agamemnon's queen, that she anon
Start from her couch and with a shrill voice cry
A joyous welcome to the beacon-blaze,
For Ilion's fall; such fiery message gleams
From yon high flame; and I, before the rest,
Will foot the lightsome measure of our joy;
For I can say, *My master's dice fell fair—*
Behold! the triple sice, the lucky flame!
Now be my lot to clasp, in loyal love,
The hand of him restored, who rules our home:
Home—but I say no more: upon my tongue
Treads hard the ox o' the adage.[2]
Had it voice,
The home itself might soothliest tell its tale;
I, of set will, speak words the wise may learn,
To others, nought remember nor discern.
(*He withdraws. The* CHORUS OF ARGIVE ELDERS *enters, each leaning on a staff. During their song* CLYTEMNESTRA *appears in the background, kindling the altars.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)
Ten livelong years have rolled away,
Since the twin lords of sceptred sway,
By Zeus endowed with pride of place,
The doughty chiefs of Atreus' race,
Went forth of yore,
To plead with Priam, face to face,
Before the judgment-seat of War!

A thousand ships from Argive land
Put forth to bear the martial band,
That with a spirit stern and strong

Went out to right the kingdom's wrong—
Pealed, as they went, the battle-song,
  Wild as the vultures' cry;
When o'er the eyrie, soaring high,
In wild bereavèd agony,
Around, around, in airy rings,
They wheel with oarage of their wings,
But not the eyas-brood behold,
That called them to the nest of old;
But let Apollo from the sky,
Or Pan, or Zeus, but hear the cry,
The exile cry, the wail forlorn,
Of birds from whom their home is torn—
On those who wrought the rapine fell,
Heaven sends the vengeful fiends of hell.

Even so doth Zeus, the jealous lord
And guardian of the hearth and board,
Speed Atreus' sons, in vengeful ire,
'Gainst Paris—sends them forth on fire,
Her to buy back, in war and blood,
Whom one did wed but many woo'd!
And many, many, by his will,
The last embrace of foes shall feel,
And many a knee in dust be bowed,
And splintered spears on shields ring loud,
Of Trojan and of Greek, before
That iron bridal-feast be o'er!
But as he willed 'tis ordered all,
And woes, by heaven ordained, must fall—
Unsoothed by tears or spilth of wine
Poured forth too late, the wrath divine
Glares vengeance on the flameless shrine.

And we in grey dishonoured eld,
Feeble of frame, unfit were held
To join the warrior array
That then went forth unto the fray:
And here at home we tarry, fain
Our feeble footsteps to sustain,
Each on his staff—so strength doth wane,
And turns to childishness again.
For while the sap of youth is green,

And, yet unripened, leaps within,
The young are weakly as the old,
And each alike unmeet to hold
The vantage post of war!
And ah! when flower and fruit are o'er,
And on life's tree the leaves are sere,
Age wendeth propped its journey drear,
As forceless as a child, as light
And fleeting as a dream of night
Lost in the garish day!
But thou, O child of Tyndareus,
Queen Clytemnestra, speak! and say
What messenger of joy to-day
Hath won thine ear? what welcome news,
That thus in sacrificial wise
E'en to the city's boundaries
Thou biddest altar-fires arise?
Each god who doth our city guard,
And keeps o'er Argos watch and ward
From heaven above, from earth below—
The mighty lords who rule the skies,
The market's lesser deities,
To each and all the altars glow,
Piled for the sacrifice!
And here and there, anear, afar,
Streams skyward many a beacon-star,
Conjur'd and charm'd and kindled well
By pure oil's soft and guileless spell,
Hid now no more
Within the palace' secret store.

O queen, we pray thee, whatsoe'er,
Known unto thee, were well revealed,
That thou wilt trust it to our ear,
And bid our anxious heart be healed!
That waneth now unto despair—
Now, waxing to a presage fair,
Dawns, from the altar, Hope—to scare
From our rent hearts the vulture Care.

strophe 1

List! for the power is mine, to chant on high
The chiefs' emprise, the strength that omens gave!

List! on my soul breathes yet a harmony,
From realms of ageless powers, and strong to save!

How brother kings, twin lords of one command,
Led forth the youth of Hellas in their flower,
Urged on their way, with vengeful spear and brand,
By warrior-birds, that watched the parting hour.

Go forth to Troy, the eagles seemed to cry—
And the sea-kings obeyed the sky-kings' word,
When on the right they soared across the sky,
And one was black, one bore a white tail barred.

High o'er the palace were they seen to soar,
Then lit in sight of all, and rent and tare,
Far from the fields that she should range no more,
Big with her unborn brood, a mother-hare.

(Ah woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

antistrophe 1

And one beheld, the soldier-prophet true,
And the two chiefs, unlike of soul and will,
In the twy-coloured eagles straight he knew,
And spake the omen forth, for good and ill.

Go forth, he cried, *and Priam's town shall fall.*
Yet long the time shall be; and flock and herd,
The people's wealth, that roam before the wall,
Shall force hew down, when Fate shall give the word.

But O beware! lest wrath in Heaven abide,
To dim the glowing battle-forge once more,
And mar the mighty curb of Trojan pride,
The steel of vengeance, welded as for war!

For virgin Artemis bears jealous hate
Against the royal house, the eagle-pair,
Who rend the unborn brood, insatiate—
Yea, loathes their banquet on the quivering hare.

(Ah woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

epode

For well she loves—the goddess kind and mild—
The tender new-born cubs of lions bold,
Too weak to range—and well the sucking child
Of every beast that roams by wood and wold.

So to the Lord of Heaven she prayeth still,
"Nay, if it must be, be the omen true!
Yet do the visioned eagles presage ill;
The end be well, but crossed with evil too!"

Healer Apollo! be her wrath controll'd,
Nor weave the long delay of thwarting gales,
To war against the Danaans and withhold
From the free ocean-waves their eager sails!

She craves, alas! to see a second life
Shed forth, a curst unhallowed sacrifice—
'Twixt wedded souls, artificer of strife,
And hate that knows not fear, and fell device.

At home there tarries like a lurking snake,
Biding its time, a wrath unreconciled,
A wily watcher, passionate to slake,
In blood, resentment for a murdered child.

Such was the mighty warning, pealed of yore—
Amid good tidings, such the word of fear,
What time the fateful eagles hovered o'er
The kings, and Calchas read the omen clear.

(In strains like his, once more,
Sing woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

strophe 2

Zeus—if to The Unknown
That name of many names seem good—
Zeus, upon Thee I call.
Thro' the mind's every road
I passed, but vain are all,
Save that which names thee Zeus, the Highest One,
Were it but mine to cast away the load,
The weary load, that weighs my spirit down.

antistrophe 2

He that was Lord of old,
In full-blown pride of place and valour bold,
Hath fallen and is gone, even as an old tale told!
And he that next held sway,
By stronger grasp o'erthrown
Hath pass'd away! [3]
And whoso now shall bid the triumph-chant arise
To Zeus, and Zeus alone,
He shall be found the truly wise.

strophe 3

'Tis Zeus alone who shows the perfect way
Of knowledge: He hath ruled,
Men shall learn wisdom, by affliction schooled.

In visions of the night, like dropping rain,
Descend the many memories of pain
Before the spirit's sight: through tears and dole
Comes wisdom o'er the unwilling soul—
A boon, I wot, of all Divinity,
That holds its sacred throne in strength, above the sky!

antistrophe 3

And then the elder chief, at whose command
The fleet of Greece was manned,
Cast on the seer no word of hate,
But veered before the sudden breath of Fate—

Ah, weary while! for, ere they put forth sail,
Did every store, each minish'd vessel, fail,
While all the Achaean host
At Aulis anchored lay,
Looking across to Chalcis and the coast
Where refluent waters welter, rock, and sway;

strophe 4

And rife with ill delay
From northern Strymon blew the thwarting blast—
Mother of famine fell,
That holds men wand'ring still
Far from the haven where they fain would be!—
And pitiless did waste
Each ship and cable, rotting on the sea,

And, doubling with delay each weary hour,
Withered with hope deferred th' Achaeans' warlike flower.

But when, for bitter storm, a deadlier relief,
And heavier with ill to either chief,
Pleading the ire of Artemis, the seer avowed,
The two Atreidae smote their sceptres on the plain,
And, striving hard, could not their tears restrain!

antistrophe 4

And then the elder monarch spake aloud—
Ill lot were mine, to disobey!
And ill, to smite my child, my household's love and pride!
To stain with virgin blood a father's hands, and slay
My daughter, by the altar's side!
'Twixt woe and woe I dwell—
I dare not like a recreant fly,
And leave the league of ships, and fail each true ally;
For rightfully they crave, with eager fiery mind,
The virgin's blood, shed forth to lull the adverse wind—
God send the deed be well!

strophe 5

Thus on his neck he took
Fate's hard compelling yoke;
Then, in the counter-gale of will abhorr'd, accursed,
To recklessness his shifting spirit veered—
Alas! that Frenzy, first of ills and worst,
With evil craft men's souls to sin hath ever stirred!

And so he steeled his heart—ah, well-a-day—
Aiding a war for one false woman's sake,
His child to slay,
And with her spilt blood make
An offering, to speed the ships upon their way!

antistrophe 5

Lusting for war, the bloody arbiters
Closed heart and ears, and would nor hear nor heed
The girl-voice plead,
Pity me, Father! nor her prayers,
Nor tender, virgin years.

So, when the chant of sacrifice was done,
Her father bade the youthful priestly train
Raise her, like some poor kid, above the altar-stone,
From where amid her robes she lay
Sunk all in swoon away—
Bade them, as with the bit that mutely tames the steed,
Her fair lips' speech refrain,
Lest she should speak a curse on Atreus' home and seed,

strophe 6

So, trailing on the earth her robe of saffron dye,
With one last piteous dart from her beseeching eye
Those that should smite she smote—
Fair, silent, as a pictur'd form, but fain
To plead, *Is all forgot?*
How oft those halls of old,
Wherein my sire high feast did hold,
Rang to the virginal soft strain,
When I, a stainless child,
Sang from pure lips and undefiled,
Sang of my sire, and all
His honoured life, and how on him should fall
Heaven's highest gift and gain!

antistrophe 6

And then—but I beheld not, nor can tell,
What further fate befel:
But this is sure, that Calchas' boding strain
Can ne'er be void or vain.
This wage from Justice' hand do sufferers earn,
The future to discern:
And yet—farewell, O secret of To-morrow!
Fore-knowledge is fore-sorrow.
Clear with the clear beams of the morrow's sun,
The future presseth on.
Now, let the house's tale, how dark soe'er,
Find yet an issue fair!—
So prays the loyal, solitary band
That guards the Apian land.

(*They turn to* CLYTEMNESTRA, *who leaves the altars and comes forward.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O queen, I come in reverence of thy sway—
For, while the ruler's kingly seat is void,
The loyal heart before his consort bends.
Now—be it sure and certain news of good,
Or the fair tidings of a flatt'ring hope,
That bids thee spread the light from shrine to shrine,
I, fain to hear, yet grudge not if thou hide.

CLYTEMNESTRA

As saith the adage, *From the womb of Night*
Spring forth, with promise fair, the young child Light.
Ay—fairer even than all hope my news—
By Grecian hands is Priam's city ta'en!

LEADER

What say'st thou? doubtful heart makes treach'rous ear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hear then again, and plainly—Troy is ours!

LEADER

Thrills thro' my heart such joy as wakens tears.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ay, thro' those tears thine eye looks loyalty.

LEADER

But hast thou proof, to make assurance sure?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Go to; I have—unless the god has lied.

LEADER

Hath some night-vision won thee to belief?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Out on all presage of a slumb'rous soul!

LEADER

But wert thou cheered by Rumour's wingless word?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Peace—thou dost chide me as a credulous girl.

LEADER

Say then, how long ago the city fell?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Even in this night that now brings forth the dawn.

LEADER

Yet who so swift could speed the message here?

CLYTEMNESTRA

From Ida's top Hephaestus, lord of fire,[4]
Sent forth his sign; and on, and ever on,
Beacon to beacon sped the courier-flame.
From Ida to the crag, that Hermes loves,
Of Lemnos; thence unto the steep sublime
Of Athos, throne of Zeus, the broad blaze flared.
Thence, raised aloft to shoot across the sea,
The moving light, rejoicing in its strength,
Sped from the pyre of pine, and urged its way,
In golden glory, like some strange new sun,
Onward, and reached Macistus' watching heights.
There, with no dull delay nor heedless sleep,
The watcher sped the tidings on in turn,
Until the guard upon Messapius' peak
Saw the far flame gleam on Euripus' tide,
And from the high-piled heap of withered furze
Lit the new sign and bade the message on.
Then the strong light, far-flown and yet undimmed,
Shot thro' the sky above Asopus' plain,
Bright as the moon, and on Cithaeron's crag
Aroused another watch of flying fire.
And there the sentinels no whit disowned,
But sent redoubled on, the hest of flame—
Swift shot the light, above Gorgopis' bay,
To Aegiplanctus' mount, and bade the peak
Fail not the onward ordinance of fire.
And like a long beard streaming in the wind,
Full-fed with fuel, roared and rose the blaze,
And onward flaring, gleamed above the cape,
Beneath which shimmers the Saronic bay,
And thence leapt light unto Arachne's peak,
The mountain watch that looks upon our town.
Thence to th' Atreides' roof—in lineage fair,
A bright posterity of Ida's fire.
So sped from stage to stage, fulfilled in turn,
Flame after flame, along the course ordained,

And lo! the last to speed upon its way
Sights the end first, and glows unto the goal.
And Troy is ta'en, and by this sign my lord
Tells me the tale, and ye have learned my word.

LEADER

To heaven, O queen, will I upraise new song:
But, wouldst thou speak once more, I fain would hear
From first to last the marvel of the tale.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Think you—this very morn—the Greeks in Troy,
And loud therein the voice of utter wail!
Within one cup pour vinegar and oil,
And look! unblent, unreconciled, they war.
So in the twofold issue of the strife
Mingle the victor's shout, the captives' moan.
For all the conquered whom the sword has spared
Cling weeping—some unto a brother slain,
Some childlike to a nursing father's form,
And wail the loved and lost, the while their neck
Bows down already 'neath the captive's chain.
And lo! the victors, now the fight is done,
Goaded by restless hunger, far and wide
Range all disordered thro' the town, to snatch
Such victual and such rest as chance may give
Within the captive halls that once were Troy—
Joyful to rid them of the frost and dew,
Wherein they couched upon the plain of old—
Joyful to sleep the gracious night all through,
Unsummoned of the watching sentinel.
Yet let them reverence well the city's gods,
The lords of Troy, tho' fallen, and her shrines;
So shall the spoilers not in turn be spoiled.
Yea, let no craving for forbidden gain
Bid conquerors yield before the darts of greed.
For we need yet, before the race be won,
Homewards, unharmed, to round the course once more.
For should the host wax wanton ere it come,
Then, tho' the sudden blow of fate be spared,
Yet in the sight of gods shall rise once more
The great wrong of the slain, to claim revenge.
Now, hearing from this woman's mouth of mine,
The tale and eke its warning, pray with me,

Luck sway the scale, with no uncertain poise,
For my fair hopes are changed to fairer joys.

LEADER

A gracious word thy woman's lips have told,
Worthy a wise man's utterance, O my queen;
Now with clear trust in thy convincing tale
I set me to salute the gods with song,
Who bring us bliss to counterpoise our pain.
(CLYTEMNESTRA *goes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Zeus, Lord of heaven! and welcome night
Of victory, that hast our might
With all the glories crowned!
On towers of Ilion, free no more,
Hast flung the mighty mesh of war,
And closely girt them round,
Till neither warrior may 'scape,
Nor stripling lightly overleap
The trammels as they close, and close,
Till with the grip of doom our foes
In slavery's coil are bound!

Zeus, Lord of hospitality,
In grateful awe I bend to thee—
'Tis thou hast struck the blow!
At Alexander, long ago,
We marked thee bend thy vengeful bow,
But long and warily withhold
The eager shaft, which, uncontrolled
And loosed too soon or launched too high,
Had wandered bloodless through the sky.

strophe 1

Zeus, the high God!—whate'er be dim in doubt,
This can our thought track out—
The blow that fells the sinner is of God,
And as he wills, the rod
Of vengeance smiteth sore. One said of old,
The gods list not to hold
A reckoning with him whose feet oppress
The grace of holiness—
An impious word! for whenso'er the sire

Breathed forth rebellious fire—
What time his household overflowed the measure
Of bliss and health and treasure—
His children's children read the reckoning plain,
At last, in tears and pain.
On me let weal that brings no woe be sent,
And therewithal, content!
Who spurns the shrine of Right, nor wealth nor power
Shall be to him a tower,
To guard him from the gulf: there lies his lot,
Where all things are forgot.

antistrophe 1

Lust drives him on—lust, desperate and wild,
Fate's sin-contriving child—
And cure is none; beyond concealment clear,
Kindles sin's baleful glare.
As an ill coin beneath the wearing touch
Betrays by stain and smutch
Its metal false—such is the sinful wight.
Before, on pinions light,
Fair Pleasure flits, and lures him childlike on,
While home and kin make moan
Beneath the grinding burden of his crime;
Till, in the end of time,
Cast down of heaven, he pours forth fruitless prayer
To powers that will not hear.

And such did Paris come
Unto Atreides' home,
And thence, with sin and shame his welcome to repay,
Ravished the wife away—

strophe 2

And she, unto her country and her kin
Leaving the clash of shields and spears and arming ships,
And bearing unto Troy destruction for a dower,
And overbold in sin,
Went fleetly thro' the gates, at midnight hour.
Oft from the prophets' lips
Moaned out the warning and the wail—Ah woe!
Woe for the home, the home! and for the chieftains, woe!
Woe for the bride-bed, warm
Yet from the lovely limbs, the impress of the form

Of her who loved her lord, awhile ago!
And woe! for him who stands
Shamed, silent, unreproachful, stretching hands
That find her not, and sees, yet will not see,
That she is far away!
And his sad fancy, yearning o'er the sea,
Shall summon and recall
Her wraith, once more to queen it in his hall.
And sad with many memories,
The fair cold beauty of each sculptured face—
And all to hatefulness is turned their grace,
Seen blankly by forlorn and hungering eyes!

antistrophe 2

And when the night is deep,
Come visions, sweet and sad, and bearing pain
Of hopings vain—
Void, void and vain, for scarce the sleeping sight
Has seen its old delight,
When thro' the grasps of love that bid it stay
It vanishes away
On silent wings that roam adown the ways of sleep.

Such are the sights, the sorrows fell,
About our hearth—and worse, whereof I may not tell.
But, all the wide town o'er,
Each home that sent its master far away
From Hellas' shore,
Feels the keen thrill of heart, the pang of loss, to-day.
For, truth to say,
The touch of bitter death is manifold!
Familiar was each face, and dear as life,
That went unto the war,
But thither, whence a warrior went of old,
Doth nought return—
Only a spear and sword, and ashes in an urn!

strophe 3

For Ares, lord of strife,
Who doth the swaying scales of battle hold,
War's money-changer, giving dust for gold,
Sends back, to hearts that held them dear,
Scant ash of warriors, wept with many a tear,
Light to the hand, but heavy to the soul;

Yea, fills the light urn full
With what survived the flame—
Death's dusty measure of a hero's frame!

Alas! one cries, *and yet alas again!*
Our chief is gone, the hero of the spear,
And hath not left his peer!
Ah woe! another moans—*my spouse is slain,*
The death of honour, rolled in dust and blood,
Slain for a woman's sin, a false wife's shame!
Such muttered words of bitter mood
Rise against those who went forth to reclaim;
Yea, jealous wrath creeps on against th' Atreides' name.

And others, far beneath the Ilian wall,
Sleep their last sleep—the goodly chiefs and tall,
Couched in the foeman's land, whereon they gave
Their breath, and lords of Troy, each in his Trojan grave.

antistrophe 3

Therefore for each and all the city's breast
Is heavy with a wrath suppressed,
As deeply and deadly as a curse more loud
Flung by the common crowd:
And, brooding deeply, doth my soul await
Tidings of coming fate,
Buried as yet in darkness' womb.
For not forgetful is the high gods' doom
Against the sons of carnage: all too long
Seems the unjust to prosper and be strong,
Till the dark Furies come,
And smite with stern reversal all his home,
Down into dim obstruction—he is gone,
And help and hope, among the lost, is none!

O'er him who vaunteth an exceeding fame,
Impends a woe condign;
The vengeful bolt upon his eyes doth flame,
Sped from the hand divine.
This bliss be mine, ungrudged of God, to feel—
To tread no city to the dust,
Nor see my own life thrust
Down to a slave's estate beneath another's heel!

epode

Behold, throughout the city wide
Have the swift feet of Rumour hied,
  Roused by the joyful flame:
But is the news they scatter, sooth?
Or haply do they give for truth
  Some cheat which heaven doth frame?
A child were he and all unwise,
  Who let his heart with joy be stirred.
To see the beacon-fires arise,
  And then, beneath some thwarting word,
  Sicken anon with hope deferred.
  The edge of woman's insight still
  Good news from true divideth ill;
Light rumours leap within the bound
Then fences female credence round,
But, lightly born, as lightly dies
The tale that springs of her surmise.

(*Several days are assumed to have elapsed.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Soon shall we know whereof the bale-fires tell,[5]
The beacons, kindled with transmitted flame;
Whether, as well I deem, their tale is true,
Or whether like some dream delusive came
The welcome blaze but to befool our soul.
For lo! I see a herald from the shore
Draw hither, shadowed with the olive-wreath—
And thirsty dust, twin-brother of the clay,
Speaks plain of travel far and truthful news—
No dumb surmise, nor tongue of flame in smoke,
Fitfully kindled from the mountain pyre;
But plainlier shall his voice say, *All is well,*
Or—but away, forebodings adverse, now,
And on fair promise fair fulfilment come!
And whoso for the state prays otherwise,
Himself reap harvest of his ill desire!

(*A* HERALD *enters. He is an advance messenger from* AGAMEMNON'S *forces, which have just landed.*)

HERALD

O land of Argos, fatherland of mine!
To thee at last, beneath the tenth year's sun,

My feet return; the bark of my emprise,
Tho' one by one hope's anchors broke away,
Held by the last, and now rides safely here.
Long, long my soul despaired to win, in death,
Its longed-for rest within our Argive land:
And now all hail, O earth, and hail to thee,
New-risen sun! and hail our country's God,
High-ruling Zeus, and thou, the Pythian lord,
Whose arrows smote us once—smite thou no more!
Was not thy wrath wreaked full upon our heads,
O king Apollo, by Scamander's side?
Turn thou, be turned, be saviour, healer, now!
And hail, all gods who rule the street and mart
And Hermes hail! my patron and my pride,
Herald of heaven, and lord of heralds here!
And Heroes, ye who sped us on our way—
To one and all I cry, *Receive again*
With grace such Argives as the spear has spared.

Ah, home of royalty, belovèd halls,
And solemn shrines, and gods that front the morn!
Benign as erst, with sun-flushed aspect greet
The king returning after many days.
For as from night flash out the beams of day,
So out of darkness dawns a light, a king,
On you, on Argos—Agamemnon comes.
Then hail and greet him well! such meed befits
Him whose right hand hewed down the towers of Troy
With the great axe of Zeus who righteth wrong—
And smote the plain, smote down to nothingness
Each altar, every shrine; and far and wide
Dies from the whole land's face its offspring fair.
Such mighty yoke of fate he set on Troy—
Our lord and monarch, Atreus' elder son,
And comes at last with blissful honour home;
Highest of all who walk on earth to-day—
Not Paris nor the city's self that paid
Sin's price with him, can boast, *Whate'er befall,*
The guerdon we have won outweighs it all.
But at Fate's judgment-seat the robber stands
Condemned of rapine, and his prey is torn
Forth from his hands, and by his deed is reaped
A bloody harvest of his home and land

Gone down to death, and for his guilt and lust
His father's race pays double in the dust.

LEADER

Hail, herald of the Greeks, new-come from war.

HERALD

All hail! not death itself can fright me now.

LEADER

Was thine heart wrung with longing for thy land?

HERALD

So that this joy doth brim mine eyes with tears.

LEADER

On you too then this sweet distress did fall—

HERALD

How say'st thou? make me master of thy word.

LEADER

You longed for us who pined for you again.

HERALD

Craved the land us who craved it, love for love?

LEADER

Yea, till my brooding heart moaned out with pain.

HERALD

Whence thy despair, that mars the army's joy?

LEADER

Sole cure of wrong is silence, saith the saw.

HERALD

Thy kings afar, couldst thou fear other men?

LEADER

Death had been sweet, as thou didst say but now.

HERALD

'Tis true; Fate smiles at last. Throughout our toil,
These many years, some chances issued fair,
And some, I wot, were chequered with a curse.
But who, on earth, hath won the bliss of heaven,
Thro' time's whole tenor an unbroken weal?

I could a tale unfold of toiling oars,
Ill rest, scant landings on a shore rock-strewn,
All pains, all sorrows, for our daily doom.
And worse and hatefuller our woes on land;
For where we couched, close by the foeman's wall,
The river-plain was ever dank with dews,
Dropped from the sky, exuded from the earth,
A curse that clung unto our sodden garb,
And hair as horrent as a wild beast's fell.
Why tell the woes of winter, when the birds
Lay stark and stiff, so stern was Ida's snow?
Or summer's scorch, what time the stirless wave
Sank to its sleep beneath the noon-day sun?
Why mourn old woes? their pain has passed away;
And passed away, from those who fell, all care,
For evermore, to rise and live again.
Why sum the count of death, and render thanks
For life by moaning over fate malign?
Farewell, a long farewell to all our woes!
To us, the remnant of the host of Greece,
Comes weal beyond all counterpoise of woe;
Thus boast we rightfully to yonder sun,
Like him far-fleeted over sea and land.
The Argive host prevailed to conquer Troy,
And in the temples of the gods of Greece
Hung up these spoils, a shining sign to Time
Let those who learn this legend bless aright
The city and its chieftains, and repay
The meed of gratitude to Zeus who willed
And wrought the deed. So stands the tale fulfilled.

LEADER

Thy words o'erbear my doubt: for news of good,
The ear of age hath ever youth enow:
But those within and Clytemnestra's self
Would fain hear all; glad thou their ears and mine.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *enters from the palace.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

That night, when first the fiery courier came,
In sign that Troy is ta'en and razed to earth,
So wild a cry of joy my lips gave out,
That I was chidden—*Hath the beacon watch*

Made sure unto thy soul the sack of Troy?
A very woman thou, whose heart leaps light
At wandering rumours!—and with words like these
They showed me how I strayed, misled of hope.
Yet on each shrine I set the sacrifice,
And, in the strain they held for feminine,
Went heralds thro' the city, to and fro,
With voice of loud proclaim, announcing joy;
And in each fane they lit and quenched with wine
The spicy perfumes fading in the flame.
All is fulfilled: I spare your longer tale—
The king himself anon shall tell me all.

Remains to think what honour best may greet
My lord, the majesty of Argos, home.
What day beams fairer on a woman's eyes
Than this, whereon she flings the portal wide,
To hail her lord, heaven-shielded, home from war?
This to my husband, that he tarry not,
But turn the city's longing into joy!
Yea, let him come, and coming may he find
A wife no other than he left her, true
And faithful as a watch-dog to his home,
His foemen's foe, in all her duties leal,
Trusty to keep for ten long years unmarred
The store whereon he set his master-seal.
Be steel deep-eyed, before ye look to see
Ill joy, ill fame, from other wight, in me!

HERALD

'Tis fairly said: thus speaks a noble dame,
Nor speaks amiss, when truth informs the boast.
(CLYTEMNESTRA *withdraws again into the palace.*)

LEADER

So has she spoken—be it yours to learn
By clear interpreters her specious word.
Turn to me, herald—tell me if anon
The second well-loved lord of Argos comes?
Hath Menelaus safely sped with you?

HERALD

Alas—brief boon unto my friends it were,
To flatter them, for truth, with falsehoods fair!

LEADER

Speak joy, if truth be joy, but truth, at worst—
Too plainly, truth and joy are here divorced.

HERALD

The hero and his bark were rapt away
Far from the Grecian fleet; 'tis truth I say.

LEADER

Whether in all men's sight from Ilion borne,
Or from the fleet by stress of weather torn?

HERALD

Full on the mark thy shaft of speech doth light,
And one short word hath told long woes aright.

LEADER

But say, what now of him each comrade saith?
What their forebodings, of his life or death?

HERALD

Ask me no more: the truth is known to none,
Save the earth-fostering, all-surveying Sun.

LEADER

Say, by what doom the fleet of Greece was driven?
How rose, how sank the storm, the wrath of heaven?

HERALD

Nay, ill it were to mar with sorrow's tale
The day of blissful news. The gods demand
Thanksgiving sundered from solicitude.
If one as herald came with rueful face
To say, *The curse has fallen, and the host*
Gone down to death; and one wide wound has reached
The city's heart, and out of many homes
Many are cast and consecrate to death,
Beneath the double scourge, that Ares loves,
The bloody pair, the fire and sword of doom—
If such sore burden weighed upon my tongue,
'Twere fit to speak such words as gladden fiends.
But—coming as he comes who bringeth news
Of safe return from toil, and issues fair,
To men rejoicing in a weal restored—
Dare I to dash good words with ill, and say

How the gods' anger smote the Greeks in storm?
For fire and sea, that erst held bitter feud,
Now swore conspiracy and pledged their faith,
Wasting the Argives worn with toil and war.
Night and great horror of the rising wave
Came o'er us, and the blasts that blow from Thrace
Clashed ship with ship, and some with plunging prow
Thro' scudding drifts of spray and raving storm
Vanished, as strays by some ill shepherd driven.
And when at length the sun rose bright, we saw
Th' Aegaean sea-field flecked with flowers of death,
Corpses of Grecian men and shattered hulls.
For us indeed, some god, as well I deem,
No human power, laid hand upon our helm,
Snatched us or prayed us from the powers of air,
And brought our bark thro' all, unharmed in hull:
And saving Fortune sat and steered us fair,
So that no surge should gulf us deep in brine,
Nor grind our keel upon a rocky shore.

So 'scaped we death that lurks beneath the sea,
But, under day's white light, mistrustful all
Of fortune's smile, we sat and brooded deep,
Shepherds forlorn of thoughts that wandered wild
O'er this new woe; for smitten was our host,
And lost as ashes scattered from the pyre.
Of whom if any draw his life-breath yet,
Be well assured, he deems of us as dead,
As we of him no other fate forebode.
But heaven save all! If Menelaus live,
He will not tarry, but will surely come:
Therefore if anywhere the high sun's ray
Descries him upon earth, preserved by Zeus,
Who wills not yet to wipe his race away,
Hope still there is that homeward he may wend.
Enough—thou hast the truth unto the end.

(*The* HERALD *departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Say, from whose lips the presage fell?
Who read the future all too well,
And named her, in her natal hour,

Helen, the bride with war for dower?
'Twas one of the Invisible,
Guiding his tongue with prescient power.
On fleet, and host, and citadel,
War, sprung from her, and death did lour,
When from the bride-bed's fine-spun veil
She to the Zephyr spread her sail.
Strong blew the breeze—the surge closed o'er
The cloven track of keel and oar,
But while she fled, there drove along,
Fast in her wake, a mighty throng—
Athirst for blood, athirst for war,
Forward in fell pursuit they sprung,
Then leapt on Simois' bank ashore,
The leafy coppices among—
No rangers, they, of wood and field,
But huntsmen of the sword and shield.

antistrophe 1

Heaven's jealousy, that works its will,
Sped thus on Troy its destined ill,
Well named, at once, the Bride and Bane;
And loud rang out the bridal strain;
But they to whom that song befell
Did turn anon to tears again;
Zeus tarries, but avenges still
The husband's wrong, the household's stain!
He, the hearth's lord, brooks not to see
Its outraged hospitality.

Even now, and in far other tone,
Troy chants her dirge of mighty moan,
Woe upon Paris, woe and hate!
Who wooed his country's doom for mate—
This is the burthen of the groan,
Wherewith she wails disconsolate
The blood, so many of her own
Have poured in vain, to fend her fate;
Troy! thou hast fed and freed to roam
A lion-cub within thy home!

strophe 2

A suckling creature, newly ta'en
From mother's teat, still fully fain

Of nursing care; and oft caressed,
Within the arms, upon the breast,
Even as an infant, has it lain;
Or fawns and licks, by hunger pressed,
The hand that will assuage its pain;
In life's young dawn, a well-loved guest,
A fondling for the children's play,
A joy unto the old and grey.

antistrophe 2

But waxing time and growth betrays
The blood-thirst of the lion-race,
And, for the house's fostering care,
Unbidden all, it revels there,
And bloody recompense repays—
Rent flesh of kine, its talons tare:
A mighty beast, that slays, and slays,
And mars with blood the household fair,
A God-sent pest invincible,
A minister of fate and hell.

strophe 3

Even so to Ilion's city came by stealth
A spirit as of windless seas and skies,
A gentle phantom-form of joy and wealth,
With love's soft arrows speeding from its eyes—
Love's rose, whose thorn doth pierce the soul in subtle wise.

Ah, well-a-day! the bitter bridal-bed,
When the fair mischief lay by Paris' side!
What curse on palace and on people sped
With her, the Fury sent on Priam's pride,
By angered Zeus! what tears of many a widowed bride!

antistrophe 3

Long, long ago to mortals this was told,
How sweet security and blissful state
Have curses for their children—so men hold—
And for the man of all-too prosperous fate
Springs from a bitter seed some woe insatiate.

Alone, alone, I deem far otherwise;
Not bliss nor wealth it is, but impious deed,
From which that after-growth of ill doth rise!

Woe springs from wrong, the plant is like the seed—
While Right, in honour's house, doth its own likeness breed.

strophe 4

Some past impiety, some grey old crime,
Breeds the young curse, that wantons in our ill,
Early or late, when haps th' appointed time—
And out of light brings power of darkness still,
A master-fiend, a foe, unseen, invincible;

A pride accursed, that broods upon the race
And home in which dark Atè holds her sway—
Sin's child and Woe's, that wears its parents' face;

antistrophe 4

While Right in smoky cribs shines clear as day,
And decks with weal his life, who walks the righteous way.

From gilded halls, that hands polluted raise,
Right turns away with proud averted eyes,
And of the wealth, men stamp amiss with praise,
Heedless, to poorer, holier temples hies,
And to Fate's goal guides all, in its appointed wise.

(AGAMEMNON *enters, riding in a chariot and accompanied by a great procession.* CASSANDRA *follows in another chariot. The* CHORUS *sings its welcome.*)

Hail to thee, chief of Atreus' race,
Returning proud from Troy subdued!
How shall I greet thy conquering face?
How nor a fulsome praise obtrude,
Nor stint the meed of gratitude?
For mortal men who fall to ill
Take little heed of open truth,
But seek unto its semblance still:
The show of weeping and of ruth
To the forlorn will all men pay,
But, of the grief their eyes display,
Nought to the heart doth pierce its way.
And, with the joyous, they beguile
Their lips unto a feignèd smile,
And force a joy, unfelt the while;
But he who as a shepherd wise

Doth know his flock, can ne'er misread
Truth in the falsehood of his eyes,
Who veils beneath a kindly guise
A lukewarm love in deed.
And thou, our leader—when of yore
Thou badest Greece go forth to war
For Helen's sake—I dare avow
That then I held thee not as now;
That to my vision thou didst seem
Dyed in the hues of disesteem.
I held thee for a pilot ill,
And reckless, of thy proper will,
Endowing others doomed to die
With vain and forced audacity!
Now from my heart, ungrudgingly,
To those that wrought, this word be said—
Well fall the labour ye have sped—
Let time and search, O king, declare
What men within thy city's bound
Were loyal to the kingdom's care,
And who were faithless found.

AGAMEMNON (*still standing in the chariot*)
First, as is meet, a king's All-hail be said
To Argos, and the gods that guard the land—
Gods who with me availed to speed us home,
With me availed to wring from Priam's town
The due of justice. In the court of heaven
The gods in conclave sat and judged the cause,
Not from a pleader's tongue, and at the close,
Unanimous into the urn of doom
This sentence gave, *On Ilion and her men,*
Death: and where hope drew nigh to pardon's urn
No hand there was to cast a vote therein.
And still the smoke of fallen Ilion
Rises in sight of all men, and the flame
Of Atè's hecatomb is living yet,
And where the towers in dusty ashes sink,
Rise the rich fumes of pomp and wealth consumed
For this must all men pay unto the gods
The meed of mindful hearts and gratitude:
For by our hands the meshes of revenge
Closed on the prey, and for one woman's sake

Troy trodden by the Argive monster lies—
The foal, the shielded band that leapt the wall,
What time with autumn sank the Pleiades.
Yea, o'er the fencing wall a lion sprang
Ravening, and lapped his fill of blood of kings.

Such prelude spoken to the gods in full,
To you I turn, and to the hidden thing
Whereof ye spake but now: and in that thought
I am as you, and what ye say, say I.
For few are they who have such inborn grace,
As to look up with love, and envy not,
When stands another on the height of weal.
Deep in his heart, whom jealousy hath seized,
Her poison lurking doth enhance his load;
For now beneath his proper woes he chafes,
And sighs withal to see another's weal.

I speak not idly, but from knowledge sure—
There be who vaunt an utter loyalty,
That is but as the ghost of friendship dead,
A shadow in a glass, of faith gone by.
One only—he who went reluctant forth
Across the seas with me—Odysseus—he
Was loyal unto me with strength and will,
A trusty trace-horse bound unto my car.
Thus—be he yet beneath the light of day,
Or dead, as well I fear—I speak his praise.

Lastly, whate'er be due to men or gods,
With joint debate, in public council held,
We will decide, and warily contrive
That all which now is well may so abide:
For that which haply needs the healer's art,
That will we medicine, discerning well
If cautery or knife befit the time.

Now, to my palace and the shrines of home,
I will pass in, and greet you first and fair,
Ye gods, who bade me forth, and home again—
And long may Victory tarry in my train!

(CLYTEMNESTRA *enters from the palace, followed by maidens bearing crimson robes.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

Old men of Argos, lieges of our realm,
Shame shall not bid me shrink lest ye should see
The love I bear my lord. Such blushing fear
Dies at the last from hearts of human kind.
From mine own soul and from no alien lips,
I know and will reveal the life I bore,
Reluctant, through the lingering livelong years,
The while my lord beleaguered Ilion's wall.

First, that a wife sat sundered from her lord,
In widowed solitude, was utter woe—
And woe, to hear how rumour's many tongues
All boded evil—woe, when he who came
And he who followed spake of ill on ill,
Keening *Lost, lost, all lost!* thro' hall and bower.
Had this my husband met so many wounds,
As by a thousand channels rumour told,
No network e'er was full of holes as he.
Had he been slain, as oft as tidings came
That he was dead, he well might boast him now
A second Geryon of triple frame,
With triple robe of earth above him laid—
For that below, no matter—triply dead,
Dead by one death for every form he bore.
And thus distraught by news of wrath and woe,
Oft for self-slaughter had I slung the noose,
But others wrenched it from my neck away.
Hence haps it that Orestes, thine and mine,
The pledge and symbol of our wedded troth,
Stands not beside us now, as he should stand.
Nor marvel thou at this: he dwells with one
Who guards him loyally; 'tis Phocis' king,
Strophius, who warned me erst, *Bethink thee, queen,*
What woes of doubtful issue well may fall!
Thy lord in daily jeopardy at Troy,
While here a populace uncurbed may cry,
"Down with the council, down!" bethink thee too,
'Tis the world's way to set a harder heel
On fallen power.
For thy child's absence then
Such mine excuse, no wily afterthought.
For me, long since the gushing fount of tears

Is wept away; no drop is left to shed.
Dim are the eyes that ever watched till dawn,
Weeping, the bale-fires, piled for thy return,
Night after night unkindled. If I slept,
Each sound—the tiny humming of a gnat,
Roused me again, again, from fitful dreams
Wherein I felt thee smitten, saw thee slain,
Thrice for each moment of mine hour of sleep.

All this I bore, and now, released from woe,
I hail my lord as watch-dog of a fold,
As saving stay-rope of a storm-tossed ship,
As column stout that holds the roof aloft,
As only child unto a sire bereaved,
As land beheld, past hope, by crews forlorn,
As sunshine fair when tempest's wrath is past,
As gushing spring to thirsty wayfarer.
So sweet it is to 'scape the press of pain.
With such salute I bid my husband hail!
Nor heaven be wroth therewith! for long and hard
I bore that ire of old.
Sweet lord, step forth,
Step from thy car, I pray—nay, not on earth
Plant the proud foot, O king, that trod down Troy!
Women! why tarry ye, whose task it is
To spread your monarch's path with tapestry?
Swift, swift, with purple strew his passage fair,
That justice lead him to a home, at last,
He scarcely looked to see.
(*The attendant women spread the tapestry.*)
For what remains,
Zeal unsubdued by sleep shall nerve my hand
To work as right and as the gods command.

AGAMEMNON (*still in the chariot*)
Daughter of Leda, watcher o'er my home,
Thy greeting well befits mine absence long,
For late and hardly has it reached its end.
Know, that the praise which honour bids us crave,
Must come from others' lips, not from our own:
See too that not in fashion feminine
Thou make a warrior's pathway delicate;
Not unto me, as to some Eastern lord,

Bowing thyself to earth, make homage loud.
Strew not this purple that shall make each step
An arrogance; such pomp beseems the gods,
Not me. A mortal man to set his foot
On these rich dyes? I hold such pride in fear,
And bid thee honour me as man, not god.
Fear not—such footcloths and all gauds apart,
Loud from the trump of Fame my name is blown;
Best gift of heaven it is, in glory's hour,
To think thereon with soberness: and thou—
Bethink thee of the adage, *Call none blest*
Till peaceful death have crowned a life of weal.
'Tis said: I fain would fare unvexed by fear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, but unsay it—thwart not thou my will!

AGAMEMNON

Know, I have said, and will not mar my word.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Was it fear made this meekness to the gods?

AGAMEMNON

If cause be cause, 'tis mine for this resolve.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What, think'st thou, in thy place had Priam done?

AGAMEMNON

He surely would have walked on broidered robes.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then fear not thou the voice of human blame.

AGAMEMNON

Yet mighty is the murmur of a crowd.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Shrink not from envy, appanage of bliss.

AGAMEMNON

War is not woman's part, nor war of words.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yet happy victors well may yield therein.

AGAMEMNON

Dost crave for triumph in this petty strife?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yield; of thy grace permit me to prevail!

AGAMEMNON

Then, if thou wilt, let some one stoop to loose
Swiftly these sandals, slaves beneath my foot;
And stepping thus upon the sea's rich dye,
I pray, *Let none among the gods look down*
With jealous eye on me—reluctant all,
To trample thus and mar a thing of price,
Wasting the wealth of garments silver-worth.
Enough hereof: and, for the stranger maid,
Lead her within, but gently: God on high
Looks graciously on him whom triumph's hour
Has made not pitiless. None willingly
Wear the slave's yoke—and she, the prize and flower
Of all we won, comes hither in my train,
Gift of the army to its chief and lord.
—Now, since in this my will bows down to thine,
I will pass in on purples to my home.

(*He descends from the chariot, and moves towards the palace.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

A Sea there is—and who shall stay its springs?
And deep within its breast, a mighty store,
Precious as silver, of the purple dye,
Whereby the dipped robe doth its tint renew.
Enough of such, O king, within thy halls
There lies, a store that cannot fail; but I—
I would have gladly vowed unto the gods
Cost of a thousand garments trodden thus,
(Had once the oracle such gift required)
Contriving ransom for thy life preserved.
For while the stock is firm the foliage climbs,
Spreading a shade, what time the dog-star glows;
And thou, returning to thine hearth and home,
Art as a genial warmth in winter hours,
Or as a coolness, when the lord of heaven
Mellows the juice within the bitter grape.
Such boons and more doth bring into a home

The present footstep of its proper lord.
Zeus, Zeus, Fulfilment's lord! my vows fulfil,
And whatsoe'er it be, work forth thy will!
(*She follows* AGAMEMNON *into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Wherefore for ever on the wings of fear
Hovers a vision drear
Before my boding heart? a strain,
Unbidden and unwelcome, thrills mine ear,
Oracular of pain.
Not as of old upon my bosom's throne
Sits Confidence, to spurn
Such fears, like dreams we know not to discern.
Old, old and grey long since the time has grown,
Which saw the linkèd cables moor
The fleet, when erst it came to Ilion's sandy shore;

antistrophe 1

And now mine eyes and not another's see
Their safe return.

Yet none the less in me
The inner spirit sings a boding song,
Self-prompted, sings the Furies' strain—
And seeks, and seeks in vain,
To hope and to be strong!

Ah! to some end of Fate, unseen, unguessed,
Are these wild throbbings of my heart and breast—
Yea, of some doom they tell—
Each pulse, a knell.
Lief, lief I were, that all
To unfulfilment's hidden realm might fall.

strophe 2

Too far, too far our mortal spirits strive,
Grasping at utter weal, unsatisfied—
Till the fell curse, that dwelleth hard beside,
Thrust down the sundering wall. Too fair they blow,
The gales that waft our bark on Fortune's tide!
Swiftly we sail, the sooner all to drive
Upon the hidden rock, the reef of woe.

Then if the hand of caution warily
Sling forth into the sea
Part of the freight, lest all should sink below,
From the deep death it saves the bark: even so,
Doom-laden though it be, once more may rise
His household, who is timely wise.

How oft the famine-stricken field
Is saved by God's large gift, the new year's yield!

antistrophe 2

But blood of man once spilled,
Once at his feet shed forth, and darkening the plain,—
Nor chant nor charm can call it back again.

So Zeus hath willed:
Else had he spared the leech Asclepius, skilled
To bring man from the dead: the hand divine
Did smite himself with death—a warning and a sign—

Ah me! if Fate, ordained of old,
Held not the will of gods constrained, controlled,
Helpless to us-ward, and apart—
Swifter than speech my heart
Had poured its presage out!
Now, fretting, chafing in the dark of doubt,
'Tis hopeless to unfold
Truth, from fear's tangled skein; and, yearning to proclaim
Its thought, my soul is prophecy and flame.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *comes out of the palace and addresses* CASSANDRA, *who has remained motionless in her chariot.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

Get thee within thou too, Cassandra, go!
For Zeus to thee in gracious mercy grants
To share the sprinklings of the lustral bowl,
Beside the altar of his guardianship,
Slave among many slaves. What, haughty still?
Step from the car; Alcmena's son, 'tis said,
Was sold perforce and bore the yoke of old.
Ay, hard it is, but, if such fate befall,
'Tis a fair chance to serve within a home
Of ancient wealth and power. An upstart lord,

To whom wealth's harvest came beyond his hope,
Is as a lion to his slaves, in all
Exceeding fierce, immoderate in sway.
Pass in: thou hearest what our ways will be

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Clear unto thee, O maid, is her command,
But thou—within the toils of Fate thou art—
If such thy will, I urge thee to obey;
Yet I misdoubt thou dost nor hear nor heed.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I wot—unless like swallows she doth use
Some strange barbarian tongue from oversea—
My words must speak persuasion to her soul.

LEADER

Obey: there is no gentler way than this.
Step from the car's high seat and follow her.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Truce to this bootless waiting here without!
I will not stay: beside the central shrine
The victims stand, prepared for knife and fire—
Offerings from hearts beyond all hope made glad.
Thou—if thou reckest aught of my command,
'Twere well done soon: but if thy sense be shut
From these my words, let thy barbarian hand
Fulfil by gesture the default of speech.

LEADER

No native is she, thus to read thy words
Unaided: like some wild thing of the wood,
New-trapped, behold! she shrinks and glares on thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

'Tis madness and the rule of mind distraught,
Since she beheld her city sink in fire,
And hither comes, nor brooks the bit, until
In foam and blood her wrath be champed away.
See ye to her; unqueenly 'tis for me,
Unheeded thus to cast away my words.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *enters the palace.*)

LEADER

But with me pity sits in anger's place.
Poor maiden, come thou from the car; no way
There is but this—take up thy servitude.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Woe, woe, alas! Earth, Mother Earth! and thou
Apollo, Apollo!

LEADER

Peace! shriek not to the bright prophetic god,
Who will not brook the suppliance of woe.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Woe, woe, alas! Earth, Mother Earth! and thou
Apollo, Apollo!

LEADER

Hark, with wild curse she calls anew on him,
Who stands far off and loathes the voice of wail.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Apollo, Apollo!
God of all ways, but only Death's to me,
Once and again, O thou, Destroyer named,
Thou hast destroyed me, thou, my love of old! [6]

LEADER

She grows presageful of her woes to come,
Slave tho' she be, instinct with prophecy.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Apollo, Apollo!
God of all ways, but only Death's to me,
O thou Apollo, thou Destroyer named!
What way hast led me, to what evil home?

LEADER

Know'st thou it not? The home of Atreus' race:
Take these my words for sooth and ask no more.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Home cursed of God! Bear witness unto me,
  Ye visioned woes within—
The blood-stained hands of them that smite their kin—
The strangling noose, and, spattered o'er
With human blood, the reeking floor!

LEADER

How like a sleuth-hound questing on the track,
Keen-scented unto blood and death she hies!

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Ah! can the ghostly guidance fail,
Whereby my prophet-soul is onwards led?
Look! for their flesh the spectre-children wail,
Their sodden limbs on which their father fed!

LEADER

Long since we knew of thy prophetic fame,—
But for those deeds we seek no prophet's tongue.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

God! 'tis another crime—
Worse than the storied woe of olden time,
Cureless, abhorred, that one is plotting here—
A shaming death, for those that should be dear!
Alas! and far away, in foreign land,
He that should help doth stand!

LEADER

I knew th' old tales, the city rings withal—
But now thy speech is dark, beyond my ken.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

O wretch, O purpose fell!
Thou for thy wedded lord
The cleansing wave hast poured—
A treacherous welcome!
How the sequel tell?
Too soon 'twill come, too soon, for now, even now,
She smites him, blow on blow!

LEADER

Riddles beyond my rede—I peer in vain
Thro' the dim films that screen the prophecy.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

God! a new sight! a net, a snare of hell,
Set by her hand—herself a snare more fell!
A wedded wife, she slays her lord,
Helped by another hand!
Ye powers, whose hate

Of Atreus' home no blood can satiate,
Raise the wild cry above the sacrifice abhorred!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Why biddest thou some fiend, I know not whom,
Shriek o'er the house? Thine is no cheering word.
Back to my heart in frozen fear I feel
My wanning life-blood run—
The blood that round the wounding steel
Ebbs slow, as sinks life's parting sun—
Swift, swift and sure, some woe comes pressing on!

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Away, away—keep him away—
The monarch of the herd, the pasture's pride,
Far from his mate! In treach'rous wrath,
Muffling his swarthy horns, with secret scathe
She gores his fenceless side!
Hark! in the brimming bath,
The heavy plash—the dying cry—
Hark—in the laver—hark, he falls by treachery!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I read amiss dark sayings such as thine,
Yet something warns me that they tell of ill.
O dark prophetic speech,
Ill tidings dost thou teach
Ever, to mortals here below!
Ever some tale of awe and woe
Thro' all thy windings manifold
Do we unriddle and unfold!

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Ah well-a-day! the cup of agony,
Whereof I chant, foams with a draught for me.
Ah lord, ah leader, thou hast led me here—
Was't but to die with thee whose doom is near?

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Distraught thou art, divinely stirred,
And wailest for thyself a tuneless lay,
As piteous as the ceaseless tale
Wherewith the brown melodious bird
Doth ever Itys! Itys! wail,
Deep-bowered in sorrow, all its little life-time's day!

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Ah for thy fate, O shrill-voiced nightingale!
Some solace for thy woes did Heaven afford,
Clothed thee with soft brown plumes, and life apart from wail—
But for my death is edged the double-biting sword!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

What pangs are these, what fruitless pain,
Sent on thee from on high?
Thou chantest terror's frantic strain,
Yet in shrill measured melody.
How thus unerring canst thou sweep along
The prophet's path of boding song?

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Woe, Paris, woe on thee! thy bridal joy
Was death and fire upon thy race and Troy!
And woe for thee, Scamander's flood!
Beside thy banks, O river fair,
I grew in tender nursing care
From childhood unto maidenhood!
Now not by thine, but by Cocytus' stream
And Acheron's banks shall ring my boding scream.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Too plain is all, too plain!
A child might read aright thy fateful strain.
Deep in my heart their piercing fang
Terror and sorrow set, the while I heard
That piteous, low, tender word,
Yet to mine ear and heart a crushing pang.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Woe for my city, woe for Ilion's fall!
Father, how oft with sanguine stain
Streamed on thine altar-stone the blood of cattle, slain
That heaven might guard our wall!
But all was shed in vain.
Low lie the shattered towers whereas they fell,
And I—ah burning heart!—shall soon lie low as well.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Of sorrow is thy song, of sorrow still!
Alas, what power of ill

Sits heavy on thy heart and bids thee tell
In tears of perfect moan thy deadly tale?
Some woe—I know not what—must close thy pious wail.

CASSANDRA (*more calmly*)
List! for no more the presage of my soul,
Bride-like, shall peer from its secluding veil;
But as the morning wind blows clear the east,
More bright shall blow the wind of prophecy,
And as against the low bright line of dawn
Heaves high and higher yet the rolling wave,
So in the clearing skies of prescience
Dawns on my soul a further, deadlier woe,
And I will speak, but in dark speech no more.
Bear witness, ye, and follow at my side—
I scent the trail of blood, shed long ago.
Within this house a choir abidingly
Chants in harsh unison the chant of ill;
Yea, and they drink, for more enhardened joy,
Man's blood for wine, and revel in the halls,
Departing never, Furies of the home.
They sit within, they chant the primal curse,
Each spitting hatred on that crime of old,
The brother's couch, the love incestuous
That brought forth hatred to the ravisher.
Say, is my speech or wild and erring now,
Or doth its arrow cleave the mark indeed?
They called me once, *The prophetess of lies,*
The wandering hag, the pest of every door—
Attest ye now, *She knows in very sooth*
The house's curse, the storied infamy.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
Yet how should oath—how loyally soe'er
I swear it—aught avail thee? In good sooth,
My wonder meets thy claim: I stand amazed
That thou, a maiden born beyond the seas,
Dost as a native know and tell aright
Tales of a city of an alien tongue.

CASSANDRA
That is my power—a boon Apollo gave.

LEADER

God though he were, yearning for mortal maid?

CASSANDRA

Ay! what seemed shame of old is shame no more.

LEADER

Such finer sense suits not with slavery.

CASSANDRA

He strove to win me, panting for my love.

LEADER

Came ye by compact unto bridal joys?

CASSANDRA

Nay—for I plighted troth, then foiled the god.

LEADER

Wert thou already dowered with prescience?

CASSANDRA

Yea—prophetess to Troy of all her doom.

LEADER

How left thee then Apollo's wrath unscathed?

CASSANDRA

I, false to him, seemed prophet false to all.

LEADER

Not so—to us at least thy words seem sooth.

CASSANDRA

Woe for me, woe! Again the agony—
Dread pain that sees the future all too well
With ghastly preludes whirls and racks my soul.
Behold ye—yonder on the palace roof
The spectre-children sitting—look, such things
As dreams are made on, phantoms as of babes,
Horrible shadows, that a kinsman's hand
Hath marked with murder, and their arms are full—
A rueful burden—see, they hold them up,
The entrails upon which their father fed!

For this, for this, I say there plots revenge
A coward lion, couching in the lair—

Guarding the gate against my master's foot—
My master—mine—I bear the slave's yoke now,
And he, the lord of ships, who trod down Troy,
Knows not the fawning treachery of tongue
Of this thing false and dog-like—how her speech
Glozes and sleeks her purpose, till she win
By ill fate's favour the desirèd chance,
Moving like Atè to a secret end.
O aweless soul! the woman slays her lord—
Woman? what loathsome monster of the earth
Were fit comparison? The double snake—
Or Scylla, where she dwells, the seaman's bane,
Girt round about with rocks? some hag of hell,
Raving a truceless curse upon her kin?
Hark—even now she cries exultingly
The vengeful cry that tells of battle turned—
How fain, forsooth, to greet her chief restored!
Nay then, believe me not: what skills belief
Or disbelief? Fate works its will—and thou
Wilt see and say in ruth, *Her tale was true.*

LEADER

Ah—'tis Thyestes' feast on kindred flesh—
I guess her meaning and with horror thrill,
Hearing no shadow'd hint of th' o'er-true tale,
But its full hatefulness: yet, for the rest,
Far from the track I roam, and know no more.

CASSANDRA

'Tis Agamemnon's doom thou shalt behold.

LEADER

Peace, hapless woman, to thy boding words!

CASSANDRA

Far from my speech stands he who sains and saves.

LEADER

Ay—were such doom at hand—which God forbid!

CASSANDRA

Thou prayest idly—these move swift to slay.

LEADER

What man prepares a deed of such despite?

CASSANDRA

Fool! thus to read amiss mine oracles.

LEADER

Deviser and device are dark to me.

CASSANDRA

Dark! all too well I speak the Grecian tongue.

LEADER

Ay—but in thine, as in Apollo's strains,
Familiar is the tongue, but dark the thought.

CASSANDRA

Ah, ah the fire! it waxes, nears me now—
Woe, woe for me, Apollo of the dawn!

Lo, how the woman-thing, the lioness
Couched with the wolf—her noble mate afar—
Will slay me, slave forlorn! Yea, like some witch,
She drugs the cup of wrath, that slays her lord,
With double death—his recompense for me!
Ay, 'tis for me, the prey he bore from Troy,
That she hath sworn his death, and edged the steel!
Ye wands, ye wreaths that cling around my neck,
Ye showed me prophetess yet scorned of all—
I stamp you into death, or e'er I die—
Down, to destruction!
Thus I stand revenged—
Go, crown some other with a prophet's woe.
Look! it is he, it is Apollo's self
Rending from me the prophet-robe he gave.
God! while I wore it yet, thou saw'st me mocked
There at my home by each malicious mouth—
To all and each, an undivided scorn.
The name alike and fate of witch and cheat—
Woe, poverty, and famine—all I bore;
And at this last the god hath brought me here
Into death's toils, and what his love had made,
His hate unmakes me now: and I shall stand
Not now before the altar of my home,
But me a slaughter-house and block of blood
Shall see hewn down, a reeking sacrifice.
Yet shall the gods have heed of me who die,

For by their will shall one requite my doom.
He, to avenge his father's blood outpoured,
Shall smite and slay with matricidal hand.
Ay, he shall come—tho' far away he roam,
A banished wanderer in a stranger's land—
To crown his kindred's edifice of ill,
Called home to vengeance by his father's fall:
Thus have the high gods sworn, and shall fulfil.
And now why mourn I, tarrying on earth,
Since first mine Ilion has found its fate
And I beheld, and those who won the wall
Pass to such issue as the gods ordain?
I too will pass and like them dare to die!
(*She turns and looks upon the palace door.*)
Portal of Hades, thus I bid thee hail!
Grant me one boon—a swift and mortal stroke,
That all unwrung by pain, with ebbing blood
Shed forth in quiet death, I close mine eyes.

LEADER

Maid of mysterious woes, mysterious lore,
Long was thy prophecy: but if aright
Thou readest all thy fate, how, thus unscared,
Dost thou approach the altar of thy doom,
As fronts the knife some victim, heaven-controlled?

CASSANDRA

Friends, there is no avoidance in delay.

LEADER

Yet who delays the longest, his the gain.

CASSANDRA

The day is come—flight were small gain to me!

LEADER

O brave endurance of a soul resolved!

CASSANDRA

That were ill praise, for those of happier doom.

LEADER

All fame is happy, even famous death.

CASSANDRA

Ah sire, ah brethren, famous once were ye!
(*She moves to enter the house, then starts back.*)

LEADER

What fear is this that scares thee from the house?

CASSANDRA

Pah!

LEADER

What is this cry? some dark despair of soul?

CASSANDRA

Pah! the house fumes with stench and spilth of blood.

LEADER

How? 'tis the smell of household offerings.

CASSANDRA

'Tis rank as charnel-scent from open graves.

LEADER

Thou canst not mean this scented Syrian nard?

CASSANDRA

Nay, let me pass within to cry aloud
The monarch's fate and mine—enough of life.
Ah friends!
Bear to me witness, since I fall in death,
That not as birds that shun the bush and scream
I moan in idle terror. This attest
When for my death's revenge another dies,
A woman for a woman, and a man
Falls, for a man ill-wedded to his curse.
Grant me this boon—the last before I die.

LEADER

Brave to the last! I mourn thy doom foreseen.

CASSANDRA

Once more one utterance, but not of wail,
Though for my death—and then I speak no more.

Sun! thou whose beam I shall not see again,
To thee I cry, Let those whom vengeance calls

To slay their kindred's slayers, quit withal
The death of me, the slave, the fenceless prey.

Ah state of mortal man! in time of weal,
A line, a shadow! and if ill fate fall,
One wet sponge-sweep wipes all our trace away—
And this I deem less piteous, of the twain.

(*She enters the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Too true it is! our mortal state
With bliss is never satiate,
And none, before the palace high
And stately of prosperity,
Cries to us with a voice of fear,
Away! 'tis ill to enter here!

Lo! this our lord hath trodden down,
By grace of heaven, old Priam's town,
And praised as god he stands once more
On Argos' shore!
Yet now—if blood shed long ago
Cries out that other blood shall flow—
His life-blood, his, to pay again
The stern requital of the slain—
Peace to that braggart's vaunting vain,
Who, having heard the chieftain's tale,
Yet boasts of bliss untouched by bale!

(*A loud cry is heard from within.*)

VOICE OF AGAMEMNON

O I am sped—a deep, a mortal blow.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Listen, listen! who is screaming as in mortal agony?

VOICE OF AGAMEMNON

O! O! again, another, another blow!

LEADER

The bloody act is over—I have heard the monarch's cry—
Let us swiftly take some counsel, lest we too be doomed to die.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

'Tis best, I judge, aloud for aid to call,
"Ho! loyal Argives! to the palace, all!"

ANOTHER

Better, I deem, ourselves to bear the aid,
And drag the deed to light, while drips the blade.

ANOTHER

Such will is mine, and what thou say'st I say:
Swiftly to act! the time brooks no delay.

ANOTHER

Ay, for 'tis plain, this prelude of their song
Foretells its close in tyranny and wrong.

ANOTHER

Behold, we tarry—but thy name, Delay,
They spurn, and press with sleepless hand to slay.

ANOTHER

I know not what 'twere well to counsel now—
Who wills to act, 'tis his to counsel how.

ANOTHER

Thy doubt is mine: for when a man is slain,
I have no words to bring his life again.

ANOTHER

What? e'en for life's sake, bow us to obey
These house-defilers and their tyrant sway?

ANOTHER

Unmanly doom! 'twere better far to die—
Death is a gentler lord than tyranny.

ANOTHER

Think well—must cry or sign of woe or pain
Fix our conclusion that the chief is slain?

ANOTHER

Such talk befits us when the deed we see—
Conjecture dwells afar from certainty.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I read one will from many a diverse word,
To know aright, how stands it with our lord!

(*The central doors of the palace open, disclosing* CLYTEMNESTRA, *who comes forward. She has blood smeared upon her forehead. The body of* AGAMEMNON *lies, muffled in a long robe, within a silver-sided laver; the corpse of* CASSANDRA *is laid beside him.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ho, ye who heard me speak so long and oft
The glozing word that led me to my will—
Hear how I shrink not to unsay it all!
How else should one who willeth to requite
Evil for evil to an enemy
Disguised as friend, weave the mesh straitly round him,
Not to be overleaped, a net of doom?
This is the sum and issue of old strife,
Of me deep-pondered and at length fulfilled.
All is avowed, and as I smote I stand
With foot set firm upon a finished thing!
I turn not to denial: thus I wrought
So that he could nor flee nor ward his doom.
Even as the trammel hems the scaly shoal,
I trapped him with inextricable toils,
The ill abundance of a baffling robe;
Then smote him, once, again—and at each wound
He cried aloud, then as in death relaxed
Each limb and sank to earth; and as he lay,
Once more I smote him, with the last third blow,
Sacred to Hades, saviour of the dead.
And thus he fell, and as he passed away,
Spirit with body chafed; each dying breath
Flung from his breast swift bubbling jets of gore,
And the dark sprinklings of the rain of blood
Fell upon me; and I was fain to feel
That dew—not sweeter is the rain of heaven
To cornland, when the green sheath teems with grain.
Elders of Argos—since the thing stands so,
I bid you to rejoice, if such your will:
Rejoice or not, I vaunt and praise the deed,
And well I ween, if seemly it could be,
'Twere not ill done to pour libations here,
Justly—ay, more than justly—on his corpse
Who filled his home with curses as with wine,
And thus returned to drain the cup he filled.

LEADER

I marvel at thy tongue's audacity,
To vaunt thus loudly o'er a husband slain.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ye hold me as a woman, weak of will,
And strive to sway me: but my heart is stout,
Nor fears to speak its uttermost to you,
Albeit ye know its message. Praise or blame,
Even as ye list,—I reck not of your words.
Lo! at my feet lies Agamemnon slain,
My husband once—and him this hand of mine,
A right contriver, fashioned for his death.
Behold the deed!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woman, what deadly birth,
What venomed essence of the earth
Or dark distilment of the wave,
To thee such passion gave,
Nerving thine hand
To set upon thy brow this burning crown,
The curses of thy land?
Our king by thee cut off, hewn down!
Go forth—they cry—*accursèd and forlorn,*
To hate and scorn!

CLYTEMNESTRA

O ye just men, who speak my sentence now,
The city's hate, the ban of all my realm!
Ye had no voice of old to launch such doom
On him, my husband, when he held as light
My daughter's life as that of sheep or goat,
One victim from the thronging fleecy fold!
Yea, slew in sacrifice his child and mine,
The well-loved issue of my travail-pangs,
To lull and lay the gales that blew from Thrace.
That deed of his, I say, that stain and shame,
Had rightly been atoned by banishment;
But ye, who then were dumb, are stern to judge
This deed of mine that doth affront your ears.
Storm out your threats, yet knowing this for sooth,
That I am ready, if your hand prevail
As mine now doth, to bow beneath your sway:

If God say nay, it shall be yours to learn
By chastisement a late humility.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Bold is thy craft, and proud
Thy confidence, thy vaunting loud;
Thy soul, that chose a murd'ress' fate,
Is all with blood elate—
Maddened to know
The blood not yet avenged, the damnèd spot
Crimson upon thy brow.
But Fate prepares for thee thy lot—
Smitten as thou didst smite, without a friend,
To meet thine end!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hear then the sanction of the oath I swear—
By the great vengeance for my murdered child,
By Atè, by the Fury unto whom
This man lies sacrificed by hand of mine,
I do not look to tread the hall of Fear,
While in this hearth and home of mine there burns
The light of love—Aegisthus—as of old
Loyal, a stalwart shield of confidence—
As true to me as this slain man was false,
Wronging his wife with paramours at Troy,
Fresh from the kiss of each Chryseis there!
Behold him dead—behold his captive prize,
Seeress and harlot—comfort of his bed,
True prophetess, true paramour—I wot
The sea-bench was not closer to the flesh,
Full oft, of every rower, than was she.
See, ill they did, and ill requites them now.
His death ye know: she as a dying swan
Sang her last dirge, and lies, as erst she lay,
Close to his side, and to my couch has left
A sweet new taste of joys that know no fear.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Ah woe and well-a-day! I would that Fate—
Not bearing agony too great,
Nor stretching me too long on couch of pain—
Would bid mine eyelids keep

The morningless and unawakening sleep! [7]
For life is weary, now my lord is slain,
The gracious among kings!
Hard fate of old he bore and many grievous things,
And for a woman's sake, on Ilian land—
Now is his life hewn down, and by a woman's hand.

refrain 1

O Helen, O infatuate soul,
Who bad'st the tides of battle roll,
O'erwhelming thousands, life on life,
'Neath Ilion's wall!
And now lies dead the lord of all.
The blossom of thy storied sin
Bears blood's inexpiable stain,
O thou that erst, these halls within,
Wert unto all a rock of strife,
A husband's bane!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

Peace! pray not thou for death as though
Thine heart was whelmed beneath this woe,
Nor turn thy wrath aside to ban
The name of Helen, nor recall
How she, one bane of many a man,
Sent down to death the Danaan lords,
To sleep at Troy the sleep of swords,
And wrought the woe that shattered all.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Fiend of the race! that swoopest fell
Upon the double stock of Tantalus,
Lording it o'er me by a woman's will,
Stern, manful, and imperious—
A bitter sway to me!
Thy very form I see,
Like some grim raven, perched upon the slain,
Exulting o'er the crime, aloud, in tuneless strain!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

Right was that word—thou namest well
The brooding race-fiend, triply fell!
From him it is that murder's thirst,

Blood-lapping, inwardly is nursed—
Ere time the ancient scar can sain,
New blood comes welling forth again.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Grim is his wrath and heavy on our home,
That fiend of whom thy voice has cried,
Alas, an omened cry of woe unsatisfied,
An all-devouring doom!

Ah woe, ah Zeus! from Zeus all things befall—
Zeus the high cause and finisher of all!—
Lord of our mortal state, by him are willed
All things, by him fulfilled!

refrain 2

Yet ah my king, my king no more!
What words to say, what tears to pour
Can tell my love for thee?
The spider-web of treachery
She wove and wound, thy life around,
And lo! I see thee lie,
And thro' a coward, impious wound
Pant forth thy life and die!
A death of shame—ah woe on woe!
A treach'rous hand, a cleaving blow!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

My guilt thou harpest, o'er and o'er!
I bid thee reckon me no more
As Agamemnon's spouse.
The old Avenger, stern of mood
For Atreus and his feast of blood,
Hath struck the lord of Atreus' house,
And in the semblance of his wife
The king hath slain.—
Yea, for the murdered children's life,
A chieftain's in requital ta'en.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Thou guiltless of this murder, thou!
Who dares such thought avow?

Yet it may be, wroth for the parent's deed,
The fiend hath holpen thee to slay the son.
Dark Ares, god of death, is pressing on
Thro' streams of blood by kindred shed,
Exacting the accompt for children dead,
For clotted blood, for flesh on which their sire did feed.

refrain 2

Yet ah my king, my king no more!
What words to say, what tears to pour
Can tell my love for thee?
The spider-web of treachery
She wove and wound, thy life around,
And lo! I see thee lie,
And thro' a coward, impious wound
Pant forth thy life and die!
A death of shame—ah woe on woe!
A treach'rous hand, a cleaving blow!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

I deem not that the death he died
Had overmuch of shame:
For this was he who did provide
Foul wrong unto his house and name:
His daughter, blossom of my womb,
He gave unto a deadly doom,
Iphigenia, child of tears!
And as he wrought, even so he fares.
Nor be his vaunt too loud in hell;
For by the sword his sin he wrought,
And by the sword himself is brought
Among the dead to dwell.

CHORUS

strophe 3

Ah whither shall I fly?
For all in ruin sinks the kingly hall;
Nor swift device nor shift of thought have I,
To 'scape its fall.
A little while the gentler rain-drops fail;
I stand distraught—a ghastly interval,
Till on the roof-tree rings the bursting hail
Of blood and doom. Even now fate whets the steel
On whetstones new and deadlier than of old,

The steel that smites, in Justice' hold,
Another death to deal.
O Earth! that I had lain at rest
And lapped for ever in thy breast,
Ere I had seen my chieftain fall
Within the laver's silver wall,
Low-lying on dishonoured bier!
And who shall give him sepulchre,
And who the wail of sorrow pour?
Woman, 'tis thine no more!
A graceless gift unto his shade
Such tribute, by his murd'ress paid!
Strive not thus wrongly to atone
The impious deed thy hand hath done.
Ah who above the god-like chief
Shall weep the tears of loyal grief?
Who speak above his lowly grave
The last sad praises of the brave?

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

Peace! for such task is none of thine.
By me he fell, by me he died,
And now his burial rites be mine!
Yet from these halls no mourners' train
Shall celebrate his obsequies;
Only by Acheron's rolling tide
His child shall spring unto his side,
And in a daughter's loving wise
Shall clasp and kiss him once again!

CHORUS

antistrophe 3

Lo! sin by sin and sorrow dogg'd by sorrow—
And who the end can know?
The slayer of to-day shall die to-morrow—
The wage of wrong is woe.
While Time shall be, while Zeus in heaven is lord,
His law is fixed and stern;
On him that wrought shall vengeance be outpoured—
The tides of doom return.
The children of the curse abide within
These halls of high estate—
And none can wrench from off the home of sin
The clinging grasp of fate.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

Now walks thy word aright, to tell
This ancient truth of oracle;
But I with vows of sooth will pray
To him, the power that holdeth sway
O'er all the race of Pleisthenes—
Tho' dark the deed and deep the guilt,
With this last blood, my hands have spilt,
I pray thee let thine anger cease!
I pray thee pass from us away
To some new race in other lands,
There, if thou wilt, to wrong and slay
The lives of men by kindred hands.

For me 'tis all sufficient meed,
Tho' little wealth or power were won,
So I can say, *'Tis past and done.*
The bloody lust and murderous,
The inborn frenzy of our house,
Is ended, by my deed!

(AEGISTHUS *and his armed attendants enter.*)

AEGISTHUS

Dawn of the day of rightful vengeance, hail!
I dare at length aver that gods above
Have care of men and heed of earthly wrongs.
I, I who stand and thus exult to see
This man lie wound in robes the Furies wove,
Slain in the requital of his father's craft.
Take ye the truth, that Atreus, this man's sire,
The lord and monarch of this land of old,
Held with my sire Thyestes deep dispute,
Brother with brother, for the prize of sway,
And drave him from his home to banishment.
Thereafter, the lorn exile homeward stole
And clung a suppliant to the hearth divine,
And for himself won this immunity—
Not with his own blood to defile the land
That gave him birth. But Atreus, godless sire
Of him who here lies dead, this welcome planned—
With zeal that was not love he feigned to hold
In loyal joy a day of festal cheer,
And bade my father to his board, and set

Before him flesh that was his children once.
First, sitting at the upper board alone,
He hid the fingers and the feet, but gave
The rest—and readily Thyestes took
What to his ignorance no semblance wore
Of human flesh, and ate: behold what curse
That eating brought upon our race and name!
For when he knew what all unhallowed thing
He thus had wrought, with horror's bitter cry
Back-starting, spewing forth the fragments foul,
On Pelops' house a deadly curse he spake—
As darkly as I spurn this damnèd food,
So perish all the race of Pleisthenes!
Thus by that curse fell he whom here ye see,
And I—who else?—this murder wove and planned;
For me, an infant yet in swaddling bands,
Of the three children youngest, Atreus sent
To banishment by my sad father's side:
But Justice brought me home once more, grown now
To manhood's years; and stranger tho' I was,
My right hand reached unto the chieftain's life,
Plotting and planning all that malice bade.
And death itself were honour now to me,
Beholding him in Justice' ambush ta'en.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Aegisthus, for this insolence of thine
That vaunts itself in evil, take my scorn.
Of thine own will, thou sayest, thou hast slain
The chieftain, by thine own unaided plot
Devised the piteous death: I rede thee well,
Think not thy head shall 'scape, when right prevails,
The people's ban, the stones of death and doom.

AEGISTHUS

This word from thee, this word from one who rows
Low at the oars beneath, what time we rule,
We of the upper tier? Thou'lt know anon,
'Tis bitter to be taught again in age,
By one so young, submission at the word.
But iron of the chain and hunger's throes
Can minister unto an o'erswoln pride
Marvellous well, ay, even in the old.

Hast eyes, and seest not this? Peace—kick not thus
Against the pricks, unto thy proper pain!

LEADER

Thou womanish man, waiting till war did cease,
Home-watcher and defiler of the couch,
And arch-deviser of the chieftain's doom!

AEGISTHUS

Bold words again! but they shall end in tears.
The very converse, thine, of Orpheus' tongue:
He roused and led in ecstasy of joy
All things that heard his voice melodious;
But thou as with the futile cry of curs
Wilt draw men wrathfully upon thee. Peace!
Or strong subjection soon shall tame thy tongue.

LEADER

Ay, thou art one to hold an Argive down—
Thou, skilled to plan the murder of the king,
But not with thine own hand to smite the blow!

AEGISTHUS

That fraudful force was woman's very part,
Not mine, whom deep suspicion from of old
Would have debarred. Now by his treasure's aid
My purpose holds to rule the citizens.
But whoso will not bear my guiding hand,
Him for his corn-fed mettle I will drive
Not as a trace-horse, light-caparisoned,
But to the shafts with heaviest harness bound.
Famine, the grim mate of the dungeon dark,
Shall look on him and shall behold him tame.

LEADER

Thou losel soul, was then thy strength too slight
To deal in murder, while a woman's hand,
Staining and shaming Argos and its gods,
Availed to slay him? Ho, if anywhere
The light of life smite on Orestes' eyes,
Let him, returning by some guardian fate,
Hew down with force her paramour and her!

AEGISTHUS

How thy word and act shall issue, thou shalt shortly understand.

LEADER

Up to action, O my comrades! for the fight is hard at hand.
Swift, your right hands to the sword hilt! bare the weapon as for strife—

AEGISTHUS

Lo! I too am standing ready, hand on hilt for death or life.

LEADER

'Twas thy word and we accept it: onward to the chance of war!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, enough, enough, my champion! we will smite and slay no more.
Already have we reaped enough the harvest-field of guilt:
Enough of wrong and murder, let no other blood be spilt.
Peace, old men! and pass away unto the homes by Fate decreed,
Lest ill valour meet our vengeance—'twas a necessary deed.
But enough of toils and troubles—be the end, if ever, now,
Ere thy talon, O Avenger, deal another deadly blow.
'Tis a woman's word of warning, and let who will list thereto.

AEGISTHUS

But that these should loose and lavish reckless blossoms of the tongue,
And in hazard of their fortune cast upon me words of wrong,
And forget the law of subjects, and revile their ruler's word—

LEADER

Ruler? but 'tis not for Argives, thus to own a dastard lord!

AEGISTHUS

I will follow to chastise thee in my coming days of sway.

LEADER

Not if Fortune guide Orestes safely on his homeward way.

AEGISTHUS

Ah, well I know how exiles feed on hopes of their return.

LEADER

Fare and batten on pollution of the right, while 'tis thy turn.

AEGISTHUS

Thou shalt pay, be well assurèd, heavy quittance for thy pride.

LEADER

Crow and strut, with her to watch thee, like a cock, his mate beside!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Heed not thou too highly of them—let the cur-pack growl and yell:
I and thou will rule the palace and will order all things well.

(AEGISTHUS *and* CLYTEMNESTRA *move towards the palace, as the* CHORUS *sullenly withdraws.*)

1. He is alluding to Clytemnestra.

2. An "ox on the tongue" refers to a proverbial expression connoting complete silence.

3. Morshead's note here reads, "These are Uranus and Cronus, predecessors of Zeus on the throne of heaven."

4. A complete discussion of the problem of the fire beacon, coupled with an ingenious explanation, probably not tenable, may be found in A. W. Verrall's introduction to his text of the *Agamemnon.*

5. The lapse of several days is assumed to take place here. Critics are not unanimous in accepting this view. Morshead's translation for line 587 has been altered to accord with the theory here adopted.

6. Morshead, in a note to this passage, has pointed to the overwhelming difficulties which face the translator in his attempt to render it in English.

7. Morshead quotes as his source for this line a passage from M. Arnold's *Thyrsis.*

VI
THE CHOEPHORI

Characters in the Play

Orestes, *son of* Agamemnon *and* Clytemnestra
Chorus of Slave Women
Electra, *sister of* Orestes
A Nurse
Clytemnestra
Aegisthus
An Attendant
Pylades, *friend of* Orestes,

THE CHOEPHORI

(SCENE:—*By the tomb of Agamemnon near the palace in Argos.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter, dressed as travellers.* ORESTES *carries two locks of hair in his hand.*)

ORESTES

LORD of the shades and patron of the realm
That erst my father swayed, list now my prayer,
Hermes, and save me with thine aiding arm,
Me who from banishment returning stand
On this my country; lo, my foot is set
On this grave-mound, and herald-like, as thou,
Once and again, I bid my father hear.
And these twin locks, from mine head shorn, I bring,
And one to Inachus the river-god,
My young life's nurturer, I dedicate,
And one in sign of mourning unfulfilled
I lay, though late, on this my father's grave.
For O my father, not beside thy corse
Stood I to wail thy death, nor was my hand
Stretched out to bear thee forth to burial.

What sight is yonder? what this woman-throng
Hitherward coming, by their sable garb
Made manifest as mourners? What hath chanced?
Doth some new sorrow hap within the home?
Or rightly may I deem that they draw near
Bearing libations, such as soothe the ire
Of dead men angered, to my father's grave?
Nay, such they are indeed; for I descry
Electra mine own sister pacing hither,
In moody grief conspicuous. Grant, O Zeus,
Grant me my father's murder to avenge—

Be thou my willing champion!
Pylades,
Pass we aside, till rightly I discern
Wherefore these women throng in suppliance.

(PYLADES *and* ORESTES *withdraw; the* CHORUS *enters bearing vessels for libation;* ELECTRA *follows them; they pace slowly towards the tomb of Agamemnon.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Forth from the royal halls by high command
I bear libations for the dead.
Rings on my smitten breast my smiting hand,
And all my cheek is rent and red,
Fresh-furrowed by my nails, and all my soul
This many a day doth feed on cries of dole.
And trailing tatters of my vest,
In looped and windowed raggedness forlorn,
Hang rent around my breast,
Even as I, by blows of Fate most stern
Saddened and torn.

antistrophe 1

Oracular thro' visions, ghastly clear,
Bearing a blast of wrath from realms below,
And stiffening each rising hair with dread,
Came out of dream-land Fear,
And, loud and awful, bade
The shriek ring out at midnight's witching hour,
And brooded, stern with woe,
Above the inner house, the woman's bower
And seers inspired did read the dream on oath,
Chanting aloud *In realms below*
The dead are wroth;
Against their slayers yet their ire doth glow.

strophe 2

Therefore to bear this gift of graceless worth—
O Earth, my nursing mother!—
The woman god-accurs'd doth send me forth
Lest one crime bring another.
Ill is the very word to speak, for none
Can ransom or atone
For blood once shed and darkening the plain.

O hearth of woe and bane,
O state that low doth lie!
Sunless, accursed of men, the shadows brood
Above the home of murdered majesty.

antistrophe 2

Rumour of might, unquestioned, unsubdued,
Pervading ears and soul of lesser men,
Is silent now and dead.
Yet rules a viler dread;
For bliss and power, however won,
As gods, and more than gods, dazzle our mortal ken.

Justice doth mark, with scales that swiftly sway,
Some that are yet in light;
Others in interspace of day and night,
Till Fate arouse them, stay;
And some are lapped in night, where all things are undone.

strophe 3

On the life-giving lap of Earth
Blood hath flowed forth;
And now, the seed of vengeance, clots the plain—
Unmelting, uneffaced the stain.
And Atè tarries long, but at the last
The sinner's heart is cast
Into pervading, waxing pangs of pain.

antistrophe 3

Lo, when man's force doth ope
The virgin doors, there is nor cure nor hope
For what is lost,—even so, I deem,
Though in one channel ran Earth's every stream,
Laving the hand defiled from murder's stain,
It were in vain.

epode

And upon me—ah me!—the gods have laid
The woe that wrapped round Troy,
What time they led me down from home and kin
Unto a slave's employ—
The doom to bow the head
And watch our master's will
Work deeds of good and ill—
To see the headlong sway of force and sin,

And hold restrained the spirit's bitter hate,
Wailing the monarch's fruitless fate,
Hiding my face within my robe, and fain
Of tears, and chilled with frost of hidden pain.

ELECTRA

Handmaidens, orderers of the palace-halls,
Since at my side ye come, a suppliant train,
Companions of this offering, counsel me
As best befits the time: for I, who pour
Upon the grave these streams funereal,
With what fair word can I invoke my sire?
Shall I aver, *Behold, I bear these gifts*
From well-loved wife unto her well-loved lord,
When 'tis from her, my mother, that they come?
I dare not say it: of all words I fail
Wherewith to consecrate unto my sire
These sacrificial honours on his grave.
Or shall I speak this word, as mortals use—
Give back, to those who send these coronals,
Full recompense—of ills for acts malign?
Or shall I pour this draught for Earth to drink,
Sans word or reverence, as my sire was slain,
And homeward pass with unreverted eyes,
Casting the bowl away, as one who flings
The household cleansings to the common road?
Be art and part, O friends, in this my doubt,
Even as ye are in that one common hate
Whereby we live attended: fear ye not
The wrath of any man, nor hide your word
Within your breast: the day of death and doom
Awaits alike the freeman and the slave.
Speak, then, if aught thou know'st to aid us more.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thou biddest; I will speak my soul's thought out,
Revering as a shrine thy father's grave.

ELECTRA

Say then thy say, as thou his tomb reverest.

LEADER

Speak solemn words to them that love, and pour.

ELECTRA
And of his kin whom dare I name as kind?

LEADER
Thyself; and next, whoe'er Aegisthus scorns.

ELECTRA
Then 'tis myself and thou, my prayer must name.

LEADER
Whoe'er they be, 'tis thine to know and name them.

ELECTRA
Is there no other we may claim as ours?

LEADER
Think of Orestes, though far-off he be.

ELECTRA
Right well in this too hast thou schooled my thought.

LEADER
Mindfully, next, on those who shed the blood—

ELECTRA
Pray on them what? expound, instruct my doubt.

LEADER
This: *Upon them some god or mortal come—*

ELECTRA
As judge or as avenger? speak thy thought.

LEADER
Pray in set terms, *Who shall the slayer slay.*

ELECTRA
Beseemeth it to ask such boon of heaven?

LEADER
How not, to wreak a wrong upon a foe?

ELECTRA (*praying at the tomb*)
O mighty Hermes, warder of the shades,
Herald of upper and of under world,
Proclaim and usher down my prayer's appeal
Unto the gods below, that they with eyes
Watchful behold these halls, my sire's of old—

And unto Earth, the mother of all things,
And foster-nurse, and womb that takes their seed.

Lo, I that pour these draughts for men now dead,
Call on my father, who yet holds in ruth
Me and mine own Orestes, *Father, speak—*
How shall thy children rule thine halls again?
Homeless we are and sold; and she who sold
Is she who bore us; and the price she took
Is he who joined with her to work thy death,
Aegisthus, her new lord. Behold me here
Brought down to slave's estate, and far away
Wanders Orestes, banished from the wealth
That once was thine, the profit of thy care,
Whereon these revel in a shameful joy.
Father, my prayer is said; 'tis thine to hear—
Grant that some fair fate bring Orestes home,
And unto me grant these—a purer soul
Than is my mother's, a more stainless hand.

These be my prayers for us; for thee, O sire,
I cry that one may come to smite thy foes,
And that the slayers may in turn be slain.
Cursed is their prayer, and thus I bar its path,
Praying mine own, a counter-curse on them.
And thou, send up to us the righteous boon
For which we pray; thine aids be heaven and earth,
And justice guide the right to victory.
(*To the* CHORUS)
Thus have I prayed, and thus I shed these streams,
And follow ye the wont, and as with flowers
Crown ye with many a tear and cry the dirge
Your lips ring out above the dead man's grave.
(*She pours the libations.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Woe, woe, woe!
Let the teardrop fall, plashing on the ground
Where our lord lies low:
Fall and cleanse away the cursed libation's stain,
Shed on this grave-mound,
Fenced wherein together, gifts of good or bane
From the dead are found.

Lord of Argos, hearken!
Though around thee darken
Mist of death and hell, arise and hear!
Hearken and awaken to our cry of woe!
Who with might of spear
Shall our home deliver?
Who like Ares bend until it quiver,
Bend the northern bow?
Who with hand upon the hilt himself will thrust with glaive,
Thrust and slay and save?

ELECTRA

Lo! the earth drinks them, to my sire they pass—
(*She notices the locks of* ORESTES.)
Learn ye with me of this thing new and strange.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Speak thou; my breast doth palpitate with fear.

ELECTRA

I see upon the tomb a curl new shorn.

LEADER

Shorn from what man or what deep-girded maid?

ELECTRA

That may he guess who will; the sign is plain.

LEADER

Let me learn this of thee; let youth prompt age.

ELECTRA

None is there here but I, to clip such gift.

LEADER

For they who thus should mourn him hate him sore.

ELECTRA

And lo! in truth the hair exceeding like—

LEADER

Like to what locks and whose? instruct me that.

ELECTRA

Like unto those my father's children wear.

LEADER

Then is this lock Orestes' secret gift?

ELECTRA

Most like it is unto the curls he wore.

LEADER

Yet how dared he to come unto his home?

ELECTRA

He hath but sent it, clipt to mourn his sire.

LEADER

It is a sorrow grievous as his death,
That he should live yet never dare return.

ELECTRA

Yea, and my heart o'erflows with gall of grief,
And I am pierced as with a cleaving dart;
Like to the first drops after drought, my tears
Fall down at will, a bitter bursting tide,
As on this lock I gaze; I cannot deem
That any Argive save Orestes' self
Was ever lord thereof; nor, well I wot,
Hath she, the murd'ress, shorn and laid this lock
To mourn him whom she slew—my mother she,
Bearing no mother's heart, but to her race
A loathing spirit, loathed itself of heaven!
Yet to affirm, as utterly made sure,
That this adornment cometh of the hand
Of mine Orestes, brother of my soul,
I may not venture, yet hope flatters fair!
Ah well-a-day, that this dumb hair had voice
To glad mine ears, as might a messenger,
Bidding me sway no more 'twixt fear and hope,
Clearly commanding, *Cast me hence away,*
Clipped was I from some head thou lovest not;
Or, *I am kin to thee, and here, as thou,*
I come to weep and deck our father's grave.
Aid me, ye gods! for well indeed ye know
How in the gale and counter-gale of doubt,
Like to the seaman's bark, we whirl and stray.
But, if God will our life, how strong shall spring,
From seed how small, the new tree of our home!—
Lo ye, a second sign—these footsteps, look,—

Like to my own, a corresponsive print;
And look, another footmark,—this his own,
And that the foot of one who walked with him.
Mark, how the heel and tendons' print combine,
Measured exact, with mine coincident!
Alas, for doubt and anguish rack my mind.
(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter suddenly.*)

ORESTES
Pray thou, in gratitude for prayers fulfilled,
Fair fall the rest of what I ask of heaven.

ELECTRA
Wherefore? what win I from the gods by prayer?

ORESTES
This, that thine eyes behold thy heart's desire.

ELECTRA
On whom of mortals know'st thou that I call?

ORESTES
I know thy yearning for Orestes deep.

ELECTRA
Say then, wherein event hath crowned my prayer?

ORESTES
I, I am he; seek not one more akin.

ELECTRA
Some fraud, O stranger, weavest thou for me?

ORESTES
Against myself I weave it, if I weave.

ELECTRA
Ah, thou hast mind to mock me in my woe!

ORESTES
'Tis at mine own I mock then, mocking thine.

ELECTRA
Speak I with thee then as Orestes' self?

ORESTES
My very face thou see'st and know'st me not,
And yet but now, when thou didst see the lock

Shorn for my father's grave, and when thy quest
Was eager on the footprints I had made,
Even I, thy brother, shaped and sized as thou,
Fluttered thy spirit, as at sight of me!
Lay now this ringlet whence 'twas shorn, and judge,
And look upon this robe, thine own hands' work,
The shuttle-prints, the creature wrought thereon—
Refrain thyself, nor prudence lose in joy,
For well I wot, our kin are less than kind.

ELECTRA

O thou that art unto our father's home
Love, grief and hope, for thee the tears ran down,
For thee, the son, the saviour that should be;
Trust thou thine arm and win thy father's halls!
O aspect sweet of fourfold love to me,
Whom upon thee the heart's constraint bids call
As on my father, and the claim of love
From me unto my mother turns to thee,
For she is very hate; to thee too turns
What of my heart went out to her who died
A ruthless death upon the altar-stone;
And for myself I love thee—thee that wast
A brother leal, sole stay of love to me.
Now by thy side be strength and right, and Zeus
Saviour almighty, stand to aid the twain!

ORESTES

Zeus, Zeus! look down on our estate and us,
The orphaned brood of him, our eagle-sire,
Whom to his death a fearful serpent brought,
Enwinding him in coils; and we, bereft
And foodless, sink with famine, all too weak
To bear unto the eyrie, as he bore,
Such quarry as he slew. Lo! I and she,
Electra, stand before thee, fatherless,
And each alike cast out and homeless made.

ELECTRA

And if thou leave to death the brood of him
Whose altar blazed for thee, whose reverence
Was thine, all thine,—whence, in the after years,
Shall any hand like his adorn thy shrine
With sacrifice of flesh? the eaglets slain,

Thou wouldst not have a messenger to bear
Thine omens, once so clear, to mortal men;
So, if this kingly stock be withered all,
None on high festivals will fend thy shrine.
Stoop thou to raise us! strong the race shall grow,
Though puny now it seem, and fallen low.

LEADER

O children, saviours of your father's home,
Beware ye of your words, lest one should hear
And bear them, for the tongue hath lust to tell,
Unto our masters—whom God grant to me
In pitchy reek of fun'ral flame to see!

ORESTES

Nay, mighty is Apollo's oracle
And shall not fail me, whom it bade to pass
Thro' all this peril; clear the voice rang out
With many warnings, sternly threatening
To my hot heart the wintry chill of pain,
Unless upon the slayers of my sire
I pressed for vengeance: this the god's command—
That I, in ire for home and wealth despoiled,
Should with a craft like theirs the slayers slay:
Else with my very life I should atone
This deed undone, in many a ghastly wise.
For he proclaimed unto the ears of men
That offerings, poured to angry powers of death,
Exude again, unless their will be done,
As grim disease on those that poured them forth—
As leprous ulcers mounting on the flesh
And with fell fangs corroding what of old
Wore natural form; and on the brow arise
White poisoned hairs, the crown of this disease.
He spake moreover of assailing fiends
Empowered to quit on me my father's blood,
Wreaking their wrath on me, what time in night
Beneath shut lids the spirit's eye sees clear.
The dart that flies in darkness, sped from hell
By spirits of the murdered dead who call
Unto their kin for vengeance, formless fear,
The night-tide's visitant, and madness' curse
Should drive and rack me; and my tortured frame
Should be chased forth from man's community

As with the brazen scorpions of the scourge.
For me and such as me no lustral bowl
Should stand, no spilth of wine be poured to God
For me, and wrath unseen of my dead sire
Should drive me from the shrine; no man should dare
To take me to his hearth, nor dwell with me:
Slow, friendless, cursed of all should be mine end,
And pitiless horror wind me for the grave.
This spake the god—this dare I disobey?
Yea, though I dared, the deed must yet be done;
For to that end diverse desires combine,—
The god's behest, deep grief for him who died,
And last, the grievous blank of wealth despoiled—
All these weigh on me, urge that Argive men,
Minions of valour, who with soul of fire
Did make of fencèd Troy a ruinous heap,
Be not left slaves to two and each a woman!
For he, the man, wears woman's heart; if not,
Soon shall he know, confronted by a man.

(ORESTES, ELECTRA, *and the* CHORUS *gather round the tomb of Agamemnon. The following lines are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

Mighty Fates, on you we call!
Bid the will of Zeus ordain
Power to those, to whom again
Justice turns with hand and aid!
Grievous was the prayer one made—
Grievous let the answer fall!
Where the mighty doom is set,
Justice claims aloud her debt.
Who in blood hath dipped the steel,
Deep in blood her meed shall feel!
List an immemorial word—
Whosoe'er shall take the sword
Shall perish by the sword.

ORESTES

Father, unblest in death, O father mine!
What breath of word or deed
Can I waft on thee from this far confine
Unto thy lowly bed,—
Waft upon thee, in midst of darkness lying,

Hope's counter-gleam of fire?
Yet the loud dirge of praise brings grace undying
Unto each parted sire.

CHORUS

O child, the spirit of the dead,
Altho' upon his flesh have fed
The grim teeth of the flame,
Is quelled not; after many days
The sting of wrath his soul shall raise,
A vengeance to reclaim!
To the dead rings loud our cry—
Plain the living's treachery—
Swelling, shrilling, urged on high,
The vengeful dirge, for parents slain,
Shall strive and shall attain.

ELECTRA

Hear me too, even me, O father, hear!
Not by one child alone these groans, these tears are shed
Upon thy sepulchre.
Each, each, where thou art lowly laid,
Stands, a suppliant, homeless made:
Ah, and all is full of ill,
Comfort is there none to say!
Strive and wrestle as we may,
Still stands doom invincible.

CHORUS

Nay, if so he will, the god
Still our tears to joy can turn.
He can bid a triumph-ode
Drown the dirge beside this urn;
He to kingly halls can greet
The child restored, the homeward-guided feet.

ORESTES

Ah my father! hadst thou lain
Under Ilion's wall,
By some Lycian spearman slain,
Thou hadst left in this thine hall
Honour; thou hadst wrought for us
Fame and life most glorious.
Over-seas if thou hadst died,

Heavily had stood thy tomb,
Heaped on high; but, quenched in pride,
Grief were light unto thy home.

CHORUS

Loved and honoured hadst thou lain
By the dead that nobly fell,
In the under-world again,
Where are throned the kings of hell,
Full of sway, adorable
Thou hadst stood at their right hand—
Thou that wert, in mortal land,
By Fate's ordinance and law,
King of kings who bear the crown
And the staff, to which in awe
Mortal men bow down.

ELECTRA

Nay, O father, I were fain
Other fate had fallen on thee.
Ill it were if thou hadst lain
One among the common slain,
Fallen by Scamander's side—
Those who slew thee there should be!
Then, untouched by slavery,
We had heard as from afar
Deaths of those who should have died
'Mid the chance of war.

CHORUS

O child, forbear! things all too high thou sayest.
Easy, but vain, thy cry!
A boon above all gold is that thou prayest,
An unreached destiny,
As of the blessèd land that far aloof
Beyond the north wind lies;
Yet doth your double prayer ring loud reproof;
A double scourge of sighs
Awakes the dead; th' avengers rise, though late;
Blood stains the guilty pride
Of the accursed who rule on earth, and Fate
Stands on the children's side.

ELECTRA

That hath sped thro' mine ear, like a shaft from a bow!
Zeus, Zeus! it is thou who dost send from below
A doom on the desperate doer—ere long
On a mother a father shall visit his wrong.

CHORUS

Be it mine to upraise thro' the reek of the pyre
The chant of delight, while the funeral fire
Devoureth the corpse of a man that is slain
And a woman laid low!
For who bids me conceal it! out-rending control,
Blows ever the stern blast of hate thro' my soul,
And before me a vision of wrath and of bane
Flits and waves to and fro.

ORESTES

Zeus, thou alone to us art parent now.
Smite with a rending blow
Upon their heads, and bid the land be well:
Set right where wrong hath stood; and thou give ear,
O Earth, unto my prayer—
Yea, hear O mother Earth, and monarchy of hell!

CHORUS

Nay, the law is sternly set—
Blood-drops shed upon the ground
Plead for other bloodshed yet;
Loud the call of death doth sound,
Calling guilt of olden time,
A Fury, crowning crime with crime.

ELECTRA

Where, where are ye, avenging powers,
Puissant Furies of the slain?
Behold the relics of the race
Of Atreus, thrust from pride of place!
O Zeus, what home henceforth is ours,
What refuge to attain?

CHORUS

Lo, at your wail my heart throbs, wildly stirred;
Now am I lorn with sadness,
Darkened in all my soul, to hear your sorrow's word.

Anon to hope, the seat of strength, I rise,—
She, thrusting grief away, lifts up mine eyes
To the new dawn of gladness.

ORESTES

Skills it to tell of aught save wrong on wrong,
Wrought by our mother's deed?
Though now she fawn for pardon, sternly strong
Standeth our wrath, and will nor hear nor heed.
Her children's soul is wolfish, born from hers,
And softens not by prayers.

CHORUS

I dealt upon my breast the blow
That Asian mourning women know;
Wails from my breast the fun'ral cry,
The Cissian weeping melody;
Stretched rendingly forth, to tatter and tear,
My clenched hands wander, here and there,
From head to breast; distraught with blows
Throb dizzily my brows.

ELECTRA

Aweless in hate, O mother, sternly brave!
As in a foeman's grave
Thou laid'st in earth a king, but to the bier
No citizen drew near,—
Thy husband, thine, yet for his obsequies,
Thou bad'st no wail arise!

ORESTES

Alas, the shameful burial thou dost speak!
Yet I the vengeance of his shame will wreak—
That do the gods command!
That shall achieve mine hand!
Grant me to thrust her life away, and I
Will dare to die!

CHORUS

List thou the deed! Hewn down and foully torn,
He to the tomb was borne;
Yea, by her hand, the deed who wrought,
With like dishonour to the grave was brought,
And by her hand she strove, with strong desire,
Thy life to crush, O child, by murder of thy sire:

Bethink thee, hearing, of the shame, the pain
Wherewith that sire was slain!

ELECTRA

Yea, such was the doom of my sire; well-a-day,
I was thrust from his side,—
As a dog from the chamber they thrust me away,
And in place of my laughter rose sobbing and tears,
As in darkness I lay.
O father, if this word can pass to thine ears,
To thy soul let it reach and abide!

CHORUS

Let it pass, let it pierce, through the sense of thine ear,
To thy soul, where in silence it waiteth the hour!
The past is accomplished; but rouse thee to hear
What the future prepareth; awake and appear,
Our champion, in wrath and in power!

ORESTES

O father, to thy loved ones come in aid.

ELECTRA

With tears I call on thee.

CHORUS

Listen and rise to light!
Be thou with us, be thou against the foe!
Swiftly this cry arises—even so
Pray we, the loyal band, as we have prayed!

ORESTES

Let their might meet with mine, and their right with my right.

ELECTRA

O ye Gods, it is yours to decree.

CHORUS

Ye call unto the dead; I quake to hear.
Fate is ordained of old, and shall fulfil your prayer.

ELECTRA

Alas, the inborn curse that haunts our home,
Of Atè's bloodstained scourge the tuneless sound!
Alas, the deep insufferable doom,
The stanchless wound!

ORESTES

It shall be stanched, the task is ours,—
Not by a stranger's, but by kindred hand,
Shall be chased forth the blood-fiend of our land.
Be this our spoken spell, to call Earth's nether powers!

CHORUS

Lords of a dark eternity,
To you has come the children's cry,
Send up from hell, fulfil your aid
To them who prayed.
(*The chant is concluded.*)

ORESTES

O father, murdered in unkingly wise,
Fulfil my prayer, grant me thine halls to sway.

ELECTRA

To me, too, grant this boon—dark death to deal
Unto Aegisthus, and to 'scape my doom.

ORESTES

So shall the rightful feasts that mortals pay
Be set for thee; else, not for thee shall rise
The scented reek of altars fed with flesh,
But thou shalt lie dishonoured: hear thou me!

ELECTRA

I too, from my full heritage restored,
Will pour the lustral streams, what time I pass
Forth as a bride from these paternal halls,
And honour first, beyond all graves, thy tomb.

ORESTES

Earth, send my sire to fend me in the fight!

ELECTRA

Give fair-faced fortune, O Persephone!

ORESTES

Bethink thee, father, in the laver slain—

ELECTRA

Bethink thee of the net they handselled for thee!

ORESTES

Bonds not of brass ensnared thee, father mine.

ELECTRA

Yea, the ill craft of an enfolding robe.

ORESTES

By this our bitter speech arise, O sire!

ELECTRA

Raise thou thine head at love's last, dearest call!

ORESTES

Yea, speed forth Right to aid thy kinsmen's cause;
Grip for grip, let them grasp the foe, if thou
Willest in triumph to forget thy fall.

ELECTRA

Hear me, O father, once again hear me.
Lo! at thy tomb, two fledglings of thy brood—
A man-child and a maid; hold them in ruth,
Nor wipe them out, the last of Pelops' line.
For while they live, thou livest from the dead;
Children are memory's voices, and preserve
The dead from wholly dying: as a net
Is ever by the buoyant corks upheld,
Which save the flax-mesh, in the depth submerged.
Listen, this wail of ours doth rise for thee,
And as thou heedest it thyself art saved.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

In sooth, a blameless prayer ye spake at length—
The tomb's requital for its dirge denied:
Now, for the rest, as thou art fixed to do,
Take fortune by the hand and work thy will.

ORESTES

The doom is set; and yet I fain would ask—
Not swerving from the course of my resolve,—
Wherefore she sent these offerings, and why
She softens all too late her cureless deed?
An idle boon it was, to send them here
Unto the dead who recks not of such gifts.
I cannot guess her thought, but well I ween
Such gifts are skilless to atone such crime.

Be blood once spilled, an idle strife he strives
Who seeks with other wealth or wine outpoured
To atone the deed. So stands the word, nor fails.
Yet would I know her thought; speak, if thou knowest.

LEADER

I know it, son; for at her side I stood.
'Twas the night-wandering terror of a dream
That flung her shivering from her couch, and bade her—
Her, the accursed of God—these offerings send.

ORESTES

Heard ye the dream, to tell it forth aright?

LEADER

Yea, from herself; her womb a serpent bare.

ORESTES

What then the sum and issue of the tale?

LEADER

Even as a swaddled child, she lull'd the thing.

ORESTES

What suckling craved the creature, born full-fanged?

LEADER

Yet in her dreams she proffered it the breast.

ORESTES

How? did the hateful thing not bite her teat?

LEADER

Yea, and sucked forth a blood-gout in the milk.

ORESTES

Not vain this dream—it bodes a man's revenge.

LEADER

Then out of sleep she started with a cry,
And thro' the palace for their mistress' aid
Full many lamps, that erst lay blind with night,
Flared into light; then, even as mourners use,
She sends these offerings, in hope to win
A cure to cleave and sunder sin from doom.

ORESTES

Earth and my father's grave, to you I call—
Give this her dream fulfilment, and thro' me.
I read it in each part coincident
With what shall be; for mark, that serpent sprang
From the same womb as I, in swaddling bands
By the same hands was swathed, lipped the same breast,
And sucking forth the same sweet mother's-milk
Infused a clot of blood; and in alarm
She cried upon her wound the cry of pain.
The rede is clear: the thing of dread she nursed,
The death of blood she dies; and I, 'tis I,
In semblance of a serpent, that must slay her.
Thou art my seer, and thus I read the dream.

LEADER

So do; yet ere thou doest, speak to us,
Bidding some act, some, by not acting, aid.

ORESTES

Brief my command: I bid my sister pass
In silence to the house, and all I bid
This my design with wariness conceal,
That they who did by craft a chieftain slay
May by like craft and in like noose be ta'en,
Dying the death which Loxias foretold—
Apollo, king and prophet undisproved.
I with this warrior Pylades will come
In likeness of a stranger, full equipt
As travellers come, and at the palace gates
Will stand, as stranger yet in friendship's bond
Unto this house allied; and each of us
Will speak the tongue that round Parnassus sounds,
Feigning such speech as Phocian voices use.
And what if none of those that tend the gates
Shall welcome us with gladness, since the house
With ills divine is haunted? If this hap,
We at the gate will bide, till, passing by,
Some townsman make conjecture and proclaim,
How? is Aegisthus here, and knowingly
Keeps suppliants aloof, by bolt and bar?
Then shall I win my way; and if I cross
The threshold of the gate, the palace' guard,
And find him throned where once my father sat—

Or if he come anon, and face to face
Confronting, drop his eyes from mine—I swear
He shall not utter, *Who art thou and whence?*
Ere my steel leap, and compassed round with death
Low he shall lie: and thus, full-fed with doom,
The Fury of the house shall drain once more
A deep third draught of rich unmingled blood.
But thou, O sister, look that all within
Be well prepared to give these things event.
And ye—I say 'twere well to bear a tongue
Full of fair silence and of fitting speech
As each beseems the time; and last, do thou,
Hermes the warder-god, keep watch and ward,
And guide to victory my striving sword.
(ORESTES, PYLADES, *and* ELECTRA *depart.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Many and marvellous the things of fear
Earth's breast doth bear;
And the sea's lap with many monsters teems,
And windy levin-bolts and meteor gleams
Breed many deadly things—
Unknown and flying forms, with fear upon their wings,
And in their tread is death;
And rushing whirlwinds, of whose blasting breath
Man's tongue can tell.

antistrophe 1

But who can tell aright the fiercer thing,
The aweless soul, within man's breast inhabiting?
Who tell, how, passion-fraught and love-distraught,
The woman's eager, craving thought
Doth wed mankind to woe and ruin fell?
Yea, how the loveless love that doth possess
The woman, even as the lioness,
Doth rend and wrest apart, with eager strife,
The link of wedded life?

strophe 2

Let him be the witness, whose thought is not borne on light wings thro' the air,
But abideth with knowledge, what thing was wrought by Althea's despair;

For she marr'd the life-grace of her son, with ill counsel rekindled the flame
That was quenched as it glowed on the brand, what time from his mother he came,
With the cry of a new-born child; and the brand from the burning she won,
For the Fates had foretold it coeval, in life and in death, with her son.

antistrophe 2

Yea, and man's hate tells of another, even Scylla of murderous guile,
Who slew for an enemy's sake her father, won o'er by the wile
And the gifts of Cretan Minos, the gauds of the high-wrought gold;
For she clipped from her father's head the lock that should never wax old,
As he breathed in the silence of sleep, and knew not her craft and her crime—
But Hermes, the guard of the dead, doth grasp her, in fulness of time.

strophe 3

And since of the crimes of the cruel I tell, let my singing record
The bitter wedlock and loveless, the curse on these halls outpoured,
The crafty device of a woman, whereby did a chieftain fall,
A warrior stern in his wrath, the fear of his enemies all,—
A song of dishonour, untimely! and cold is the hearth that was warm,
And ruled by the cowardly spear, the woman's unwomanly arm.

antistrophe 3

But the summit and crown of all crimes is that which in Lemnos befell;
A woe and a mourning it is, a shame and a spitting to tell;
And he that in after time doth speak of his deadliest thought,
Doth say, *It is like to the deed that of old time in Lemnos was wrought;*
And loathed of men were the doers, and perished, they and their seed,
For the gods brought hate upon them; none loveth the impious deed.

strophe 4

It is well of these tales to tell; for the sword in the grasp of Right
With a cleaving, a piercing blow to the innermost heart doth smite,
And the deed unlawfully done is not trodden down nor forgot,
When the sinner out-steppeth the law and heedeth the high God not;

antistrophe 4

But Justice hath planted the anvil, and Destiny forgeth the sword
That shall smite in her chosen time; by her is the child restored;
And, darkly devising, the Fiend of the house, world-cursed, will repay
The price of the blood of the slain, that was shed in the bygone day.

(*The scene now is before the palace.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter, still dressed as travellers.*)

ORESTES *(knocking at the palace gate)*
What ho! slave, ho! I smite the palace gate
In vain, it seems; what ho, attend within,—
Once more, attend; come forth and ope the halls,
If yet Aegisthus holds them hospitable.

SLAVE *(from within)*
Anon, anon! *(Opens the door)*
Speak, from what land art thou, and sent from whom?

ORESTES
Go, tell to them who rule the palace-halls,
Since 'tis to them I come with tidings new—
(Delay not—Night's dark car is speeding on,
And time is now for wayfarers to cast
Anchor in haven, wheresoe'er a house
Doth welcome strangers)—that there now come forth
Some one who holds authority within—
The queen, or, if some man, more seemly were it;
For when man standeth face to face with man,
No stammering modesty confounds their speech,
But each to each doth tell his meaning clear.
(CLYTEMNESTRA *comes out of the palace.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA
Speak on, O strangers: have ye need of aught?
Here is whate'er beseems a house like this—
Warm bath and bed, tired Nature's soft restorer,
And courteous eyes to greet you; and if aught
Of graver import needeth act as well,
That, as man's charge, I to a man will tell.

ORESTES
A Daulian man am I, from Phocis bound,
And as with mine own travel-scrip self-laden
I went toward Argos, parting hitherward
With travelling foot, there did encounter me
One whom I knew not and who knew not me,
But asked my purposed way nor hid his own,
And, as we talked together, told his name—
Strophius of Phocis; then he said, "Good sir,

Since in all case thou art to Argos bound,
Forget not this my message, heed it well,
Tell to his own, *Orestes is no more.*
And—whatsoe'er his kinsfolk shall resolve,
Whether to bear his dust unto his home,
Or lay him here, in death as erst in life
Exiled for aye, a child of banishment—
Bring me their hest, upon thy backward road;
For now in brazen compass of an urn
His ashes lie, their dues of weeping paid."
So much I heard, and so much tell to thee,
Not knowing if I speak unto his kin
Who rule his home; but well, I deem, it were,
Such news should earliest reach a parent's ear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ah woe is me! thy word our ruin tells;
From roof-tree unto base are we despoiled.—
O thou whom nevermore we wrestle down,
Thou Fury of this home, how oft and oft
Thou dost descry what far aloof is laid,
Yea, from afar dost bend th' unerring bow
And rendest from my wretchedness its friends;
As now Orestes—who, a brief while since,
Safe from the mire of death stood warily,—
Was the home's hope to cure th' exulting wrong;
Now thou ordainest, *Let the ill abide.*

ORESTES

To host and hostess thus with fortune blest,
Lief had I come with better news to bear
Unto your greeting and acquaintanceship;
For what goodwill lies deeper than the bond
Of guest and host? and wrong abhorred it were,
As well I deem, if I, who pledged my faith
To one, and greetings from the other had,
Bore not aright the tidings 'twixt the twain.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Whate'er thy news, thou shalt not welcome lack,
Meet and deserved, nor scant our grace shall be.
Hadst thou thyself not come, such tale to tell,
Another, sure, had borne it to our ears.
But lo! the hour is here when travelling guests,

Fresh from the daylong labour of the road,
Should win their rightful due. (*To the slave*)
Take him within
To the man-chamber's hospitable rest—
Him and these fellow-farers at his side;
Give them such guest-right as beseems our halls;
I bid thee do as thou shalt answer for it.
And I unto the prince who rules our home
Will tell the tale, and, since we lack not friends,
With them will counsel how this hap to bear.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *goes back into the palace.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *are conducted to the guest quarters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

So be it done—
Sister-servants, when draws nigh
Time for us aloud to cry
Orestes and his victory?

O holy earth and holy tomb
Over the grave-pit heaped on high,
Where low doth Agamemnon lie,
The king of ships, the army's lord!
Now is the hour—give ear and come,
For now doth Craft her aid afford,
And Hermes, guard of shades in hell,
Stands o'er their strife, to sentinel
The dooming of the sword.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I wot the stranger worketh woe within—
For lo! I see come forth, suffused with tears,
Orestes' nurse. (*The* NURSE *enters from the palace.*)
What ho, Kilissa—thou
Beyond the doors? Where goest thou? Methinks
Some grief unbidden walketh at thy side.

NURSE

My mistress bids me, with what speed I may,
Call in Aegisthus to the stranger guests,
That he may come, and standing face to face,
A man with men, may thus more clearly learn
This rumour new. Thus speaking, to her slaves

She hid beneath the glance of fictive grief
Laughter for what is wrought—to her desire
Too well; but ill, ill, ill besets the house,
Brought by the tale these guests have told so clear.
And he, God wot, will gladden all his heart
Hearing this rumour. Woe and well-a-day!
The bitter mingled cup of ancient woes,
Hard to be borne, that here in Atreus' house
Befel, was grievous to mine inmost heart,
But never yet did I endure such pain.
All else I bore with set soul patiently;
But now—alack, alack!—Orestes dear,
The day and night-long travail of my soul!
Whom from his mother's womb, a new-born child,
I clasped and cherished! Many a time and oft
Toilsome and profitless my service was,
When his shrill outcry called me from my couch!
For the young child, before the sense is born,
Hath but a dumb thing's life, must needs be nursed
As its own nature bids. The swaddled thing
Hath nought of speech, whate'er discomfort come—
Hunger or thirst or lower weakling need,—
For the babe's stomach works its own relief.
Which knowing well before, yet oft surprised,
'Twas mine to cleanse the swaddling clothes—poor I
Was nurse to tend and fuller to make white:
Two works in one, two handicrafts I took,
When in mine arms the father laid the boy.
And now he's dead—alack and well-a-day!
Yet must I go to him whose wrongful power
Pollutes this house—fair tidings these to him!

LEADER

Say then, with what array she bids him come?

NURSE

What say'st thou! Speak more clearly for mine ear.

LEADER

Bids she bring henchmen, or to come alone?

NURSE

She bids him bring a spear-armed body-guard.

LEADER

Nay, tell not that unto our loathèd lord,
But speed to him, put on the mien of joy,
Say, *Come alone, fear nought, the news is good:*
A bearer can tell straight a twisted tale.

NURSE

Does then thy mind in this new tale find joy?

LEADER

What if Zeus bid our ill wind veer to fair?

NURSE

And how? the home's hope with Orestes dies.

LEADER

Not yet—a seer, though feeble, this might see.

NURSE

What say'st thou? Know'st thou aught, this tale belying?

LEADER

Go, tell the news to him, perform thine hest,—
What the gods will, themselves can well provide.

NURSE

Well, I will go, herein obeying thee;
And luck fall fair, with favour sent from heaven.

(*She goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Zeus, sire of them who on Olympus dwell,
Hear thou, O hear my prayer!
Grant to my rightful lords to prosper well
Even as their zeal is fair!
For right, for right goes up aloud my cry—
Zeus, aid him, stand anigh!

refrain 1

Into his father's hall he goes
To smite his father's foes.
Bid him prevail! by thee on throne of triumph set,
Twice, yea and thrice with joy shall he acquit the debt.

antistrophe 1

Bethink thee, the young steed, the orphan foal
Of sire beloved by thee, unto the car
Of doom is harnessed fast.
Guide him aright, plant firm a lasting goal,
Speed thou his pace,—O that no chance may mar
The homeward course, the last!

strophe 2

And ye who dwell within the inner chamber
Where shines the storèd joy of gold—
Gods of one heart, O hear ye, and remember;
Up and avenge the blood shed forth of old,
With sudden rightful blow;
Then let the old curse die, nor be renewed
With progeny of blood,—
Once more, and not again, be latter guilt laid low!

refrain 2

O thoù who dwell'st in Delphi's mighty cave,
Grant us to see this home once more restored
Unto its rightful lord!
Let it look forth, from veils of death, with joyous eye
Unto the dawning light of liberty;

antistrophe 2

And Hermes, Maia's child, lend hand to save,
Willing the right, and guide
Our state with Fortune's breeze adown the favouring tide.
Whate'er in darkness hidden lies,
He utters at his will;
He at his will throws darkness on our eyes,
By night and eke by day inscrutable.

strophe 3

Then, then shall wealth atone
The ills that here were done.
Then, then will we unbind,
Fling free on wafting wind
Of joy, the woman's voice that waileth now
In piercing accents for a chief laid low;

refrain 3

And this our song shall be—
Hail to the commonwealth restored!

Hail to the freedom won to me!
All hail! for doom hath passed from him, my well-loved lord!

antistrophe 3

And thou, O child, when Time and Chance agree,
Up to the deed that for thy sire is done!
And if she wail unto thee, *Spare, O son—*
Cry, *Aid, O father*—and achieve the deed,
The horror of man's tongue, the gods' great need!
Hold in thy breast such heart as Perseus had,
The bitter woe work forth,
Appease the summons of the dead,
The wrath of friends on earth;
Yea, set within a sign of blood and doom,
And do to utter death him that pollutes thy home.

(AEGISTHUS *enters alone.*)

AEGISTHUS

Hither and not unsummoned have I come;
For a new rumour, borne by stranger men
Arriving hither, hath attained mine ears,
Of hap unwished-for, even Orestes' death.
This were new sorrow, a blood-bolter'd load
Laid on the house that doth already bow
Beneath a former wound that festers deep.
Dare I opine these words have truth and life?
Or are they tales, of woman's terror born,
That fly in the void air, and die disproved?
Canst thou tell aught, and prove it to my soul?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What we have heard, we heard; go thou within
Thyself to ask the strangers of their tale.
Strengthless are tidings, thro' another heard;
Question is his, to whom the tale is brought.

AEGISTHUS

I too will meet and test the messenger,
Whether himself stood witness of the death,
Or tells it merely from dim rumour learnt:
None shall cheat me, whose soul hath watchful eyes.

(*He goes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Zeus, Zeus! what word to me is given?
What cry or prayer, invoking heaven,
Shall first by me be utterèd?
What speech of craft—nor all revealing,
Nor all too warily concealing—
Ending my speech, shall aid the deed?
For lo! in readiness is laid
The dark emprise, the rending blade;
Blood-dropping daggers shall achieve
The dateless doom of Atreus' name,
Or—kindling torch and joyful flame
In sign of new-won liberty—
Once more Orestes shall retrieve
His father's wealth, and, throned on high,
Shall hold the city's fealty.
So mighty is the grasp whereby,
Heaven-holpen, he shall trip and throw,
Unseconded, a double foe.
Ho for the victory!

(*A loud cry is heard within.*)

VOICE OF AEGISTHUS

Help, help, alas!

CHORUS

Ho there, ho! how is't within?
Is't done? is't over? Stand we here aloof
While it is wrought, that guiltless we may seem
Of this dark deed; with death is strife fulfilled.

(*An* ATTENDANT *enters from the palace.*)

ATTENDANT

O woe, O woe, my lord is done to death!
Woe, woe, and woe again, Aegisthus gone!
Hasten, fling wide the doors, unloose the bolts
Of the queen's chamber. O for some young strength
To match the need! but aid availeth nought
To him laid low for ever. Help, help, help!
Sure to deaf ears I shout, and call in vain
To slumber ineffectual. What ho!
The queen! how fareth Clytemnestra's self?
Her neck too, hers, is close upon the steel,
And soon shall sing, hewn thro' as justice wills.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *enters.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA
What ails thee, raising this ado for us?

ATTENDANT
I say the dead are come to slay the living.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Alack, I read thy riddles all too clear—
We slew by craft and by like craft shall die.
Swift, bring the axe that slew my lord of old;
I'll know anon or death or victory—
So stands the curse, so I confront it here.

(ORESTES *rushes from the palace; his sword dripping with blood.* PYLADES *is with him.*)

ORESTES
Thee too I seek: for him what's done will serve.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Woe, woe! Aegisthus, spouse and champion, slain!

ORESTES
What, lov'st the man? then in his grave lie down,
Be his in death, desert him nevermore!

CLYTEMNESTRA
Stay, child, and fear to strike. O son, this breast
Pillowed thine head full oft, while, drowsed with sleep,
Thy toothless mouth drew mother's milk from me.

ORESTES
Can I my mother spare? speak, Pylades.

PYLADES
Where then would fall the hest Apollo gave
At Delphi, where the solemn compact sworn?
Choose thou the hate of all men, not of gods.

ORESTES
Thou dost prevail; I hold thy counsel good.
(*To* CLYTEMNESTRA)
Follow; I will to slay thee at his side.
With him whom in his life thou lovedst more
Than Agamemnon, sleep in death, the meed
For hate where love, and love where hate was due!

CLYTEMNESTRA
I nursed thee young; must I forego mine eld?

ORESTES
Thou slew'st my father; shalt thou dwell with me?

CLYTEMNESTRA
Fate bore a share in these things, O my child!

ORESTES
Fate also doth provide this doom for thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Beware, O child, a parent's dying curse.

ORESTES
A parent who did cast me out to ill!

CLYTEMNESTRA
Not cast thee out, but to a friendly home.

ORESTES
Born free, I was by twofold bargain sold.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Where then the price that I received for thee?

ORESTES
The price of shame; I taunt thee not more plainly.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Nay, but recount thy father's lewdness too.

ORESTES
Home-keeping, chide not him who toils without.

CLYTEMNESTRA
'Tis hard for wives to live as widows, child.

ORESTES
The absent husband toils for them at home.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Thou growest fain to slay thy mother, child.

ORESTES
Nay, 'tis thyself wilt slay thyself, not I.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Beware thy mother's vengeful hounds from hell.

ORESTES
How shall I 'scape my father's, sparing thee?

CLYTEMNESTRA
Living, I cry as to a tomb, unheard.

ORESTES
My father's fate ordains this doom for thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Ah me! this snake it was I bore and nursed.

ORESTES
Ay, right prophetic was thy visioned fear.
Shameful thy deed was—die the death of shame!
(*He drives her into the house before him.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
Lo, even for these I mourn, a double death:
Yet since Orestes, driven on by doom,
Thus crowns the height of murders manifold,
I say, 'tis well—that not in night and death
Should sink the eye and light of this our home.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

There came on Priam's race and name
A vengeance; though it tarried long,
With heavy doom it came.
Came, too, on Agamemnon's hall
A lion-pair, twin swordsmen strong.
And last, the heritage doth fall
To him, to whom from Pythian cave
The god his deepest counsel gave.

refrain 1

Cry out, rejoice! our kingly hall
Hath 'scaped from ruin—ne'er again
Its ancient wealth be wasted all
By two usurpers, sin-defiled—
An evil path of woe and bane!

antistrophe 1

On him who dealt the dastard blow
Comes Craft, Revenge's scheming child.
And hand in hand with him doth go,
Eager for fight,
The child of Zeus, whom men below
Call Justice, naming her aright.
And on her foes her breath
Is as the blast of death;

strophe 2

For her the god who dwells in deep recess
Beneath Parnassus' brow,
Summons with loud acclaim
To rise, though late and lame,
And come with craft that worketh righteousness.

For even o'er Powers divine this law is strong—
Thou shalt not serve the wrong.

refrain 2

To that which ruleth heaven beseems it that we bow
Lo, freedom's light hath come!
Lo, now is rent away
The grim and curbing bit that held us dumb.
Up to the light, ye halls! this many a day
Too low on earth ye lay.

antistrophe 2

And Time, the great Accomplisher,
Shall cross the threshold, whensoe'er
He choose with purging hand to cleanse
The palace, driving all pollution thence.
And fair the cast of Fortune's die
Before our state's new lords shall lie,
Not as of old, but bringing fairer doom.
Lo, freedom's light hath come!

(*The central doors of the palace open, disclosing* ORESTES *standing over the corpses of* AEGISTHUS *and* CLYTEMNESTRA; *in one hand he holds his sword, in the other the robe in which* AGAMEMNON *was entangled and slain.*)

ORESTES

There lies our country's twofold tyranny,
My father's slayers, spoilers of my home.
Erst were they royal, sitting on the throne,
And loving are they yet,—their common fate
Tells the tale truly, shows their trothplight firm.
They swore to work mine ill-starred father's death,
They swore to die together; 'tis fulfilled.
O ye who stand, this great doom's witnesses,
Behold this too, the dark device which bound
My sire unhappy to his death,—behold
The mesh which trapped his hands, enwound his feet!
Stand round, unfold it—'tis the trammel-net
That wrapped a chieftain; hold it that he see,
The father—not my sire, but he whose eye
Is judge of all things, the all-seeing Sun!
Let him behold my mother's damnèd deed,
Then let him stand, when need shall be to me,
Witness that justly I have sought and slain
My mother; blameless was Aegisthus' doom—
He died the death law bids adulterers die.
But she who plotted this accursèd thing
To slay her lord, by whom she bare beneath
Her girdle once the burden of her babes,
Beloved erewhile, now turned to hateful foes—
What deem ye of her? or what venomed thing,
Sea-snake or adder, had more power than she
To poison with a touch the flesh unscarred?
So great her daring, such her impious will.
How name her, if I may not speak a curse?
A lion-springe! a laver's swathing cloth,
Wrapping a dead man, twining round his feet—
A net, a trammel, an entangling robe?
Such were the weapon of some strangling thief,
The terror of the road, a cut-purse hound—
With such device full many might he kill,
Full oft exult in heat of villainy.
Ne'er have my house so cursed an indweller—
Heaven send me, rather, childless to be slain!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe for each desperate deed!
Woe for the queen, with shame of life bereft!

And ah, for him who still is left,
Madness, dark blossom of a bloody seed!

ORESTES

Did she the deed or not? this robe gives proof,
Imbrued with blood that bathed Aegisthus' sword:
Look, how the spurted stain combines with time
To blur the many dyes that once adorned
Its pattern manifold! I now stand here,
Made glad, made sad with blood, exulting, wailing—
Hear, O thou woven web that slew my sire!
I grieve for deed and death and all my home—
Victor, pollution's damnèd stain for prize.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Alas, that none of mortal men
Can pass his life untouched by pain!
Behold, one woe is here—
Another loometh near.

ORESTES

Hark ye and learn—for what the end shall be
For me I know not: breaking from the curb
My spirit whirls me off, a conquered prey,
Borne as a charioteer by steeds distraught
Far from the course, and madness in my breast
Burneth to chant its song, and leap, and rave—
Hark ye and learn, friends, ere my reason goes!
I say that rightfully I slew my mother,
A thing God-scorned, that foully slew my sire.
And chiefest wizard of the spell that bound me
Unto this deed I name the Pythian seer
Apollo, who foretold that if I slew,
The guilt of murder done should pass from me;
But if I spared, the fate that should be mine
I dare not blazon forth—the bow of speech
Can reach not to the mark, that doom to tell.
And now behold me, how with branch and crown
I pass, a suppliant made meet to go
Unto Earth's midmost shrine, the holy ground
Of Loxias, and that renownèd light
Of ever-burning fire, to 'scape the doom
Of kindred murder: to no other shrine
(So Loxias bade) may I for refuge turn.

Bear witness, Argives, in the after time,
How came on me this dread fatality.
Living, I pass a banished wanderer hence,
To leave in death the memory of this cry.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, but the deed is well; link not thy lips
To speech ill-starred, nor vent ill-boding words—
Who hast to Argos her full freedom given,
Lopping two serpents' heads with timely blow.

ORESTES

Look, look, alas!
Handmaidens, see—what Gorgon shapes throng up
Dusky their robes and all their hair enwound—
Snakes coiled with snakes—off, off,—I must away!

LEADER

Most loyal of all sons unto thy sire,
What visions thus distract thee? Hold, abide;
Great was thy victory, and shalt thou fear?

ORESTES

These are no dreams, void shapes of haunting ill,
But clear to sight my mother's hell-hounds come!

LEADER

Nay, the fresh bloodshed still imbrues thine hands,
And thence distraction sinks into thy soul.

ORESTES

O king Apollo—see, they swarm and throng—
Black blood of hatred dripping from their eyes!

LEADER

One remedy thou hast; go, touch the shrine
Of Loxias, and rid thee of these woes.

ORESTES

Ye can behold them not, but I behold them.
Up and away! I dare abide no more.
(*He rushes out.*)

LEADER

Farewell then as thou mayst,—the god thy friend
Guard thee and aid with chances favouring.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Behold, the storm of woe divine
That raves and beats on Atreus' line
  Its great third blast hath blown.
First was Thyestes' loathly woe—
The rueful feast of long ago,
  On children's flesh, unknown.
And next the kingly chief's despite,
When he who led the Greeks to fight
  Was in the bath hewn down.
And now the offspring of the race
Stands in the third, the saviour's place,
  To save—or to consume?
O whither, ere it be fulfilled,
Ere its fierce blast be hushed and stilled,
  Shall blow the wind of doom?

NOTE FOR THE CHOEPHORI

STUDENTS of *The Choephori* have always had to work against tremendous odds because of the exceptionally corrupt state of the Greek text. Morshead, in an appendix to his translation, has outlined in brief the general course which he has attempted to follow.

VII
THE EUMENIDES

Characters in the Play

The Pythian Priestess
Apollo
Orestes
The Ghost of Clytemnestra
Chorus of Furies
Athena
Attendants of Athena
Twelve Athenian Citizens

THE EUMENIDES

(SCENE:—*Before the temple of* APOLLO *at Delphi. The* PYTHIAN PRIESTESS *enters and approaches the doors of the temple.*)

THE PYTHIAN PRIESTESS

FIRST, in this prayer, of all the gods I name
The prophet-mother Earth; and Themis next,
Second who sat—for so with truth is said—
On this her mother's shrine oracular.
Then by her grace, who unconstrained allowed,
There sat thereon another child of Earth—
Titanian Phoebe. She, in after time,
Gave o'er the throne, as birthgift to a god,
Phoebus, who in his own bears Phoebe's name.
He from the lake and ridge of Delos' isle
Steered to the port of Pallas' Attic shores,
The home of ships; and thence he passed and came
Unto this land and to Parnassus' shrine.
And at his side, with awe revering him,
There went the children of Hephaestus' seed,
The hewers of the sacred way, who tame
The stubborn tract that erst was wilderness.
And all this folk, and Delphos, chieftain-king
Of this their land, with honour gave him home;
And in his breast Zeus set a prophet's soul,
And gave to him this throne, whereon he sits,
Fourth prophet of the shrine, and, Loxias hight,
Gives voice to that which Zeus his sire decrees.

Such gods I name in my preluding prayer,
And after them, I call with honour due
On Pallas, wardress of the fane, and Nymphs
Who dwell around the rock Corycian,
Where in the hollow cave, the wild birds' haunt,

Wander the feet of lesser gods; and there,
Right well I know it, Bromian Bacchus dwells,
Since he in godship led his Maenad host,
Devising death for Pentheus, whom they rent
Piecemeal, as hare among the hounds. And last,
I call on Pleistus' springs, Poseidon's might,
And Zeus most high, the great Accomplisher.
Then as a seeress to the sacred chair
I pass and sit; and may the powers divine
Make this mine entrance fruitful in response
Beyond each former advent, triply blest.
And if there stand without, from Hellas bound,
Men seeking oracles, let each pass in
In order of the lot, as use allows;
For the god guides whate'er my tongue proclaims.

(*She goes into the interior of the temple; after a short interval, she returns in great fear.*)

Things fell to speak of, fell for eyes to see,
Have sped me forth again from Loxias' shrine,
With strength unstrung, moving erect no more,
But aiding with my hands my failing feet,
Unnerved by fear. A beldame's force is naught—
Is as a child's, when age and fear combine.
For as I pace towards the inmost fane
Bay-filleted by many a suppliant's hand,
Lo, at the central altar I descry
One crouching as for refuge—yea, a man
Abhorred of heaven; and from his hands, wherein
A sword new-drawn he holds, blood reeked and fell:
A wand he bears, the olive's topmost bough,
Twined as of purpose with a deep close tuft
Of whitest wool. This, that I plainly saw,
Plainly I tell. But lo, in front of him,
Crouched on the altar-steps, a grisly band
Of women slumbers—not like women they,
But Gorgons rather; nay, that word is weak,
Nor may I match the Gorgons' shape with theirs!
Such have I seen in painted semblance erst—
Winged Harpies, snatching food from Phineus' board,—
But these are wingless, black, and all their shape
The eye's abomination to behold.
Fell is the breath—let none draw nigh to it—

Wherewith they snort in slumber; from their eyes
Exude the damnèd drops of poisonous ire:
And such their garb as none should dare to bring
To statues of the gods or homes of men.
I wot not of the tribe wherefrom can come
So fell a legion, nor in what land Earth
Could rear, unharmed, such creatures, nor avow
That she had travailed and had brought forth death.
But, for the rest, be all these things a care
Unto the mighty Loxias, the lord
Of this our shrine: healer and prophet he,
Discerner he of portents, and the cleanser
Of other homes—behold, his own to cleanse!

(*She goes out. The central doors open, disclosing the interior of the temple.* ORESTES *clings to the central altar; the* FURIES *lie slumbering at a little distance;* APOLLO *and* HERMES *appear from the innermost shrine.*)

APOLLO (*to* ORESTES)

Lo, I desert thee never: to the end,
Hard at thy side as now, or sundered far,
I am thy guard, and to thine enemies
Implacably oppose me: look on them,
These greedy fiends, beneath my craft subdued!
See, they are fallen on sleep, these beldames old,
Unto whose grim and wizened maidenhood
Nor god nor man nor beast can e'er draw near.
Yea, evil were they born, for evil's doom,
Evil the dark abyss of Tartarus
Wherein they dwell, and they themselves the hate
Of men on earth, and of Olympian gods.
But thou, flee far and with unfaltering speed;
For they shall hunt thee through the mainland wide
Where'er throughout the tract of travelled earth
Thy foot may roam, and o'er and o'er the seas
And island homes of men. Faint not nor fail,
Too soon and timidly within thy breast
Shepherding thoughts forlorn of this thy toil;
But unto Pallas' city go, and there
Crouch at her shrine, and in thine arms enfold
Her ancient image: there we well shall find
Meet judges for this cause and suasive pleas,
Skilled to contrive for thee deliverance

From all this woe. Be such my pledge to thee,
For by my hest thou didst thy mother slay.

ORESTES

O king Apollo, since right well thou know'st
What justice bids, have heed, fulfil the same,—
Thy strength is all-sufficient to achieve.

APOLLO

Have thou too heed, nor let thy fear prevail
Above thy will. And do thou guard him, Hermes,
Whose blood is brother unto mine, whose sire
The same high God. Men call thee guide and guard,
Guide therefore thou and guard my suppliant;
For Zeus himself reveres the outlaw's right,
Boon of fair escort, upon man conferred.

(APOLLO, HERMES, *and* ORESTES *go out. The* GHOST OF CLYTEMNESTRA *rises.*)

GHOST OF CLYTEMNESTRA

Sleep on! awake! what skills your sleep to me—
Me, among all the dead by you dishonoured—
Me from whom never, in the world of death,
Dieth this course, *'Tis she who smote and slew,*
And shamed and scorned I roam? Awake, and hear
My plaint of dead men's hate intolerable.
Me, sternly slain by them that should have loved,
Me doth no god arouse him to avenge,
Hewn down in blood by matricidal hands.
Mark ye these wounds from which the heart's blood ran,
And by whose hand, bethink ye! for the sense
When shut in sleep hath then the spirit-sight,
But in the day the inward eye is blind.
List, ye who drank so oft with lapping tongue
The wineless draught by me outpoured to soothe
Your vengeful ire! how oft on kindled shrine
I laid the feast of darkness, at the hour
Abhorred of every god but you alone!
Lo, all my service trampled down and scorned!
And he hath baulked your chase, as stag the hounds;
Yea, lightly bounding from the circling toils,
Hath wried his face in scorn, and flieth far.
Awake and hear—for mine own soul I cry—

Awake, ye powers of hell! the wandering ghost
That once was Clytemnestra calls—Arise!

(*The* FURIES *mutter grimly, as in a dream.*)

Mutter and murmur! He hath flown afar—
My kin have gods to guard them, I have none!

(*The* FURIES *mutter as before.*)

O drowsed in sleep too deep to heed my pain!
Orestes flies, who me, his mother, slew.

(*The* FURIES *give a confused cry.*)

Yelping, and drowsed again? Up and be doing
That which alone is yours, the deed of hell!

(*The* FURIES *give another cry.*)

Lo, sleep and toil, the sworn confederates,
Have quelled your dragon-anger, once so fell!

THE FURIES (*muttering more fiercely and loudly*)
Seize, seize, seize, seize—mark, yonder!

GHOST
In dreams ye chase a prey, and like some hound,
That even in sleep doth ply his woodland toil,
Ye bell and bay. What do ye, sleeping here?
Be not o'ercome with toil, nor, sleep-subdued,
Be heedless of my wrong. Up! thrill your heart
With the just chidings of my tongue,—such words
Are as a spur to purpose firmly held.
Blow forth on him the breath of wrath and blood,
Scorch him with reek of fire that burns in you,
Waste him with new pursuit—swift, hound him down!
(*The* GHOST *sinks.*)

FIRST FURY (*awaking*)
Up! rouse another as I rouse thee; up!
Sleep'st thou? Rise up, and spurning sleep away,
See we if false to us this prelude rang.

CHORUS OF FURIES (*singing*)
strophe 1
Alack, alack, O sisters, we have toiled,
O much and vainly have we toiled and borne!

Vainly! and all we wrought the gods have foiled,
And turnèd us to scorn!
He hath slipped from the net, whom we chased: he hath 'scaped us who should be our prey—
O'ermastered by slumber we sang, and our quarry hath stolen away!

antistrophe 1

Thou, child of the high God Zeus, Apollo, hast robbed us and wronged;
Thou, a youth, hast down-trodden the right that to godship more ancient belonged;
Thou hast cherished thy suppliant man; the slayer, the God-forsaken,
The bane of a parent, by craft from out of our grasp thou hast taken;
A god, thou hast stolen from us the avengers a matricide son—
And who shall consider thy deed and say, *It is rightfully done?*

strophe 2

The sound of chiding scorn
Came from the land of dream;
Deep to mine inmost heart I felt it thrill and burn,
Thrust as a strong-grasped goad, to urge
Onward the chariot's team.
Thrilled, chilled with bitter inward pain
I stand as one beneath the doomsman's scourge.

antistrophe 2

Shame on the younger gods who tread down right,
Sitting on thrones of might!
Woe on the altar of earth's central fane!
Clotted on step and shrine,
Behold, the guilt of blood, the ghastly stain!

strophe 3

Woe upon thee, Apollo! uncontrolled,
Unbidden, hast thou, prophet-god, imbrued
The pure prophetic shrine with wrongful blood!
For thou too heinous a respect didst hold
Of man, too little heed of powers divine!
And us the Fates, the ancients of the earth,
Didst deem as nothing worth.

antistrophe 3

Scornful to me thou art, yet shalt not fend
My wrath from him; though unto hell he flee,
There too are we!
And he the blood-defiled, should feel and rue,

Though I were not, fiend-wrath that shall not end,
Descending on his head who foully slew.

(APOLLO *enters from the inner shrine.*)

APOLLO

Out! I command you. Out from this my home—
Haste, tarry not! Out from the mystic shrine,
Lest thy lot be to take into thy breast
The winged bright dart that from my golden string
Speeds hissing as a snake,—lest, pierced and thrilled
With agony, thou shouldst spew forth again
Black frothy heart's-blood, drawn from mortal men,
Belching the gory clots sucked forth from wounds.
These be no halls where such as you can prowl—
Go where men lay on men the doom of blood,
Heads lopped from necks, eyes from their spheres plucked out,
Hacked flesh, the flower of youthful seed crushed out,
Feet hewn away, and hands, and death beneath
The smiting stone, low moans and piteous
Of men impaled—Hark, hear ye for what feast
Ye hanker ever, and the loathing gods
Do spit upon your craving? Lo, your shape
Is all too fitted to your greed; the cave
Where lurks some lion, lapping gore, were home
More meet for you. Avaunt from sacred shrines,
Nor bring pollution by your touch on all
That nears you. Hence! and roam unshepherded—
No god there is to tend such herd as you.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O king Apollo, in our turn hear us.
Thou hast not only part in these ill things,
But art chief cause and doer of the same.

APOLLO

How? stretch thy speech to tell this, and have done.

LEADER

Thine oracle bade this man slay his mother.

APOLLO

I bade him quit his sire's death,—wherefore not?

LEADER

Then didst thou aid and guard red-handed crime.

APOLLO
Yea, and I bade him to this temple flee.

LEADER
And yet forsooth dost chide us following him!

APOLLO
Ay—not for you it is, to near this fane.

LEADER
Yet is such office ours, imposed by fate.

APOLLO
What office? vaunt the thing ye deem so fair.

LEADER
From home to home we chase the matricide.

APOLLO
What? to avenge a wife who slays her lord?

LEADER
That is not blood outpoured by kindred hands.

APOLLO
How darkly ye dishonour and annul
The troth to which the high accomplishers,
Hera and Zeus, do honour. Yea, and thus
Is Aphrodite to dishonour cast,
The queen of rapture unto mortal men.
Know, that above the marriage-bed ordained
For man and woman standeth Right as guard,
Enhancing sanctity of trothplight sworn;
Therefore, if thou art placable to those
Who have their consort slain, nor will'st to turn
On them the eye of wrath, unjust art thou
In hounding to his doom the man who slew
His mother. Lo, I know thee full of wrath
Against one deed, but all too placable
Unto the other, minishing the crime.
But in this cause shall Pallas guard the right.

LEADER
Deem not my quest shall ever quit that man.

APOLLO
Follow then, make thee double toil in vain!

LEADER
Think not by speech mine office to curtail.

APOLLO
None hast thou, that I would accept of thee!

LEADER
Yea, high thine honour by the throne of Zeus:
But I, drawn on by scent of mother's blood,
Seek vengeance on this man and hound him down.

(*The* CHORUS *goes in pursuit of* ORESTES.)

APOLLO
But I will stand beside him; 'tis for me
To guard my suppliant: gods and men alike
Do dread the curse of such an one betrayed,
And in me Fear and Will say *Leave him not.*
(*He goes into the temple.*)

(*The scene changes to Athens. In the foreground is the Temple of* ATHENA *on the Acropolis; her statue stands in the centre;* ORESTES *is seen clinging to it.*)

ORESTES
Look on me, queen Athena; lo, I come
By Loxias' behest; thou of thy grace
Receive me, driven of avenging powers—
Not now a red-hand slayer unannealed,
But with guilt fading, half-effaced, outworn
On many homes and paths of mortal men.
For to the limit of each land, each sea,
I roamed, obedient to Apollo's hest,
And come at last, O Goddess, to thy fane,
And clinging to thine image, bide my doom.

(*The* CHORUS OF FURIES *enters, questing like hounds.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
Ho! clear is here the trace of him we seek:
Follow the track of blood, the silent sign!
Like to some hound that hunts a wounded fawn,
We snuff along the scent of dripping gore,

And inwardly we pant, for many a day
Toiling in chase that shall fordo the man;
For o'er and o'er the wide land have I ranged,
And o'er the wide sea, flying without wings,
Swift as a sail I pressed upon his track,
Who now hard by is crouching, well I wot,
For scent of mortal blood allures me here.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Follow, seek him—round and round
Scent and snuff and scan the ground,
Lest unharmed he slip away,
He who did his mother slay!
Hist—he is there! See him his arms entwine
Around the image of the maid divine—
Thus aided, for the deed he wrought
Unto the judgment wills he to be brought.

It may not be! a mother's blood, poured forth
Upon the stainèd earth,
None gathers up: it lies—bear witness, Hell!—
For aye indelible!
And thou who sheddest it shalt give thine own
That shedding to atone!
Yea, from thy living limbs I suck it out,
Red, clotted, gout by gout,—
A draught abhorred of men and gods; but I
Will drain it, suck thee dry;
Yea, I will waste thee living, nerve and vein;
Yea, for thy mother slain,
Will drag thee downward, there where thou shalt dree
The weird of agony!
And thou and whosoe'er of men hath sinned—
Hath wronged or God, or friend,
Or parent,—learn ye how to all and each
The arm of doom can reach!
Sternly requiteth, in the world beneath,
The judgment-seat of Death;
Yea, Death, beholding every man's endeavour,
Recordeth it for ever.

ORESTES

I, schooled in many miseries, have learnt
How many refuges of cleansing shrines

There be; I know when law alloweth speech
And when imposeth silence. Lo, I stand
Fixed now to speak, for he whose word is wise
Commands the same. Look, how the stain of blood
Is dull upon mine hand and wastes away,
And laved and lost therewith is the deep curse
Of matricide; for while the guilt was new,
'Twas banished from me at Apollo's hearth,
Atoned and purified by death of swine.
Long were my word if I should sum the tale,
How oft since then among my fellow-men
I stood and brought no curse. Time cleanses all—
Time, the coeval of all things that are.
Now from pure lips, in words of omen fair,
I call Athena, lady of this land,
To come, my champion: so, in aftertime,
She shall not fail of love and service leal,
Not won by war, from me and from my land
And all the folk of Argos, vowed to her.
Now, be she far away in Libyan land
Where flows from Triton's lake her natal wave,—
Stand she with planted feet, or in some hour
Of rest conceal them, champion of her friends
Where'er she be,—or whether o'er the plain
Phlegraean she look forth, as warrior bold—
I cry to her to come, where'er she be,
(And she, as goddess, from afar can hear)
And aid and free me, set among my foes.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thee not Apollo nor Athena's strength
Can save from perishing, a castaway
Amid the Lost, where no delight shall meet
Thy soul—a bloodless prey of nether powers,
A shadow among shadows. Answerest thou
Nothing? dost cast away my words with scorn,
Thou, prey prepared and dedicate to me?
Not as a victim slain upon the shrine,
But living shalt thou see thy flesh my food.
Hear now the binding chant that makes thee mine.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Weave the weird dance,—behold the hour
To utter forth the chant of hell,

Our sway among mankind to tell,
The guidance of our power.
Of Justice are we ministers,
And whosoe'er of men may stand
Lifting a pure unsullied hand,
That man no doom of ours incurs,
And walks thro' all his mortal path
Untouched by woe, unharmed by wrath.
But if, as yonder man, he hath
Blood on the hands he strives to hide,
We stand avengers at his side,
Decreeing, *Thou hast wronged the dead:*
We are doom's witnesses to thee.
The price of blood, his hands have shed,
We wring from him; in life, in death,
Hard at his side are we!

strophe 1

Night, Mother Night, who brought me forth, a torment
To living men and dead,
Hear me, O hear! by Leto's stripling son
I am dishonourèd:
He hath ta'en from me him who cowers in refuge,
To me made consecrate,—
A rightful victim, him who slew his mother.
Given o'er to me and fate.

refrain 1

Hear the hymn of hell,
O'er the victim sounding,—
Chant of frenzy, chant of ill,
Sense and will confounding!
Round the soul entwining
Without lute or lyre—
Soul in madness pining,
Wasting as with fire!

antistrophe 1

Fate, all-pervading Fate, this service spun, commanding
That I should bide therein:
Whosoe'er of mortals, made perverse and lawless,
Is stained with blood of kin,
By his side are we, and hunt him ever onward,
Till to the Silent Land,

The realm of death, he cometh; neither yonder
In freedom shall he stand.

refrain 1

Hear the hymn of hell,
O'er the victim sounding,—
Chant of frenzy, chant of ill,
Sense and will confounding!
Round the soul entwining
Without lute or lyre—
Soul in madness pining,
Wasting as with fire!

strophe 2

When from womb of Night we sprang, on us this labour
Was laid and shall abide.
Gods immortal are ye, yet beware ye touch not
That which is our pride!
None may come beside us gathered round the blood-feast—
For us no garments white
Gleam on a festal day; for us a darker fate is,
Another darker rite.

refrain 2

That is mine hour when falls an ancient line—
When in the household's heart
The God of blood doth slay by kindred hands,—
Then do we bear our part:
On him who slays we sweep with chasing cry:
Though he be triply strong,
We wear and waste him; blood atones for blood,
New pain for ancient wrong.

antistrophe 2

I hold this task—'tis mine, and not another's.
The very gods on high,
Though they can silence and annul the prayers
Of those who on us cry,
They may not strive with us who stand apart,
A race by Zeus abhorred,
Blood-boltered, held unworthy of the council
And converse of Heaven's lord.

strophe 3

Therefore the more I leap upon my prey;
Upon their head I bound;

My foot is hard; as one that trips a runner
I cast them to the ground;
Yea, to the depth of doom intolerable;
And they who erst were great,
And upon earth held high their pride and glory,
Are brought to low estate.
In underworld they waste and are diminished,
The while around them fleet
Dark wavings of my robes, and, subtly woven,
The paces of my feet.

antistrophe 3

Who falls infatuate, he sees not neither knows he
That we are at his side;
So closely round about him, darkly flitting,
The cloud of guilt doth glide.
Heavily 'tis uttered, how around his hearthstone
The mirk of hell doth rise.

strophe 4

Stern and fixed the law is; we have hands t' achieve it,
Cunning to devise.
Queens are we and mindful of our solemn vengeance.
Not by tear or prayer
Shall a man avert it. In unhonoured darkness,
Far from gods, we fare,
Lit unto our task with torch of sunless regions,
And o'er a deadly way—
Deadly to the living as to those who see not
Life and light of day—
Hunt we and press onward.

antistrophe 4

Who of mortals hearing
Doth not quake for awe,
Hearing all that Fate thro' hand of God hath given us
For ordinance and law?
Yea, this right to us, in dark abysm and backward
Of ages it befel:
None shall wrong mine office, tho' in nether regions
And sunless dark I dwell.

(ATHENA *enters.*)

ATHENA

Far off I heard the clamour of your cry,
As by Scamander's side I set my foot
Asserting right upon the land given o'er
To me by those who o'er Achaea's host
Held sway and leadership: no scanty part
Of all they won by spear and sword, to me
They gave it, land and all that grew thereon,
As chosen heirloom for my Theseus' clan.
Thence summoned, sped I with a tireless foot,—
Hummed on the wind, instead of wings, the fold
Of this mine aegis, by my feet propelled,
As, linked to mettled horses, speeds a car.
And now, beholding here Earth's nether brood,
I fear it nought, yet are mine eyes amazed
With wonder. Who are ye? of all I ask,
And of this stranger to my statue clinging.
But ye—your shape is like no human form,
Like to no goddess whom the gods behold,
Like to no shape which mortal women wear.
Yet to stand by and chide a monstrous form
Is all unjust—from such words Right revolts.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O child of Zeus, one word shall tell thee all.
We are the children of eternal Night,
And Furies in the underworld are called.

ATHENA

I know your lineage now and eke your name.

LEADER

Yea, and eftsoons indeed my rights shalt know.

ATHENA

Fain would I learn them; speak them clearly forth.

LEADER

We chase from home the murderers of men.

ATHENA

And where at last can he that slew make pause?

LEADER

Where this is law—*All joy abandon here.*

ATHENA
Say, do ye bay this man to such a flight?

LEADER
Yea, for of choice he did his mother slay.

ATHENA
Urged by no fear of other wrath and doom?

LEADER
What spur can rightly goad to matricide?

ATHENA
Two stand to plead—one only have I heard.

LEADER
He will not swear nor challenge us to oath.

ATHENA
The form of justice, not its deed, thou willest.

LEADER
Prove thou that word; thou art not scant of skill.

ATHENA
I say that oaths shall not enforce the wrong.

LEADER
Then test the cause, judge and award the right.

ATHENA
Will ye to me then this decision trust?

LEADER
Yea, reverencing true child of worthy sire.

ATHENA (*to* ORESTES)
O man unknown, make thou thy plea in turn.
Speak forth thy land, thy lineage, and thy woes;
Then, if thou canst, avert this bitter blame—
If, as I deem, in confidence of right
Thou sittest hard beside my holy place,
Clasping this statue, as Ixion sat,
A sacred suppliant for Zeus to cleanse,—
To all this answer me in words made plain.

ORESTES

O queen Athena, first from thy last words
Will I a great solicitude remove.
Not one blood-guilty am I; no foul stain
Clings to thine image from my clinging hand;
Whereof one potent proof I have to tell.
Lo, the law stands—*The slayer shall not plead,*
Till by the hand of him who cleanses blood
A suckling creature's blood besprinkle him.
Long since have I this expiation done,—
In many a home, slain beasts and running streams
Have cleansed me. Thus I speak away that fear.
Next, of my lineage quickly thou shalt learn:
An Argive am I, and right well thou know'st
My sire, that Agamemnon who arrayed
The fleet and them that went therein to war—
That chief with whom thy hand combined to crush
To an uncitied heap what once was Troy;
That Agamemnon, when he homeward came,
Was brought unto no honourable death,
Slain by the dark-souled wife who brought me forth
To him,—enwound and slain in wily nets,
Blazoned with blood that in the laver ran.
And I, returning from an exiled youth,
Slew her, my mother—lo, it stands avowed!
With blood for blood avenging my loved sire;
And in this deed doth Loxias bear part,
Decreeing agonies, to goad my will,
Unless by me the guilty found their doom.
Do thou decide if right or wrong were done—
Thy dooming, whatsoe'er it be, contents me.

ATHENA

Too mighty is this matter, whosoe'er
Of mortals claims to judge hereof aright.
Yea, me, even me, eternal Right forbids
To judge the issues of blood-guilt, and wrath
That follows swift behind. This too gives pause,
That thou as one with all due rites performed
Dost come, unsinning, pure, unto my shrine.
Whate'er thou art, in this my city's name,
As uncondemned, I take thee to my side.—
Yet have these foes of thine such dues by fate,

I may not banish them: and if they fail,
O'erthrown in judgment of the cause, forthwith
Their anger's poison shall infect the land—
A dropping plague-spot of eternal ill.
Thus stand we with a woe on either hand:
Stay they, or go at my commandment forth,
Perplexity or pain must needs befall.
Yet, as on me Fate hath imposed the cause,
I choose unto me judges that shall be
An ordinance for ever, set to rule
The dues of blood-guilt, upon oath declared.
But ye, call forth your witness and your proof,
Words strong for justice, fortified by oath;
And I, whoe'er are truest in my town,
Them will I choose and bring, and straitly charge,
Look on this cause, discriminating well,
And pledge your oath to utter nought of wrong.

(ATHENA *withdraws.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Now are they all undone, the ancient laws,
If here the slayer's cause
Prevail; new wrong for ancient right shall be
If matricide go free.
Henceforth a deed like his by all shall stand,
Too ready to the hand:
Too oft shall parents in the aftertime
Rue and lament this crime,—
Taught, not in false imagining, to feel
Their children's thrusting steel:
No more the wrath, that erst on murder fell
From us, the queens of Hell,
Shall fall, no more our watching gaze impend—
Death shall smite unrestrained.

antistrophe 1

Henceforth shall one unto another cry
Lo, they are stricken, lo, they fall and die
Around me! and that other answers him,
O thou that lookest that thy woes should cease,
Behold, with dark increase
They throng and press upon thee; yea, and dim
Is all the cure, and every comfort vain!

strophe 2

Let none henceforth cry out, when falls the blow
Of sudden-smiting woe,
Cry out in sad reiterated strain
O Justice, aid! aid, O ye thrones of Hell!
So though a father or a mother wail
New-smitten by a son, it shall no more avail,
Since, overthrown by wrong, the fane of Justice fell!

antistrophe 2

Know, that a throne there is that may not pass away,
And one that sitteth on it—even Fear,
Searching with steadfast eyes man's inner soul:
Wisdom is child of pain, and born with many a tear;
But who henceforth,
What man of mortal men, what nation upon earth,
That holdeth nought in awe nor in the light
Of inner reverence, shall worship Right
As in the older day?

strophe 3

Praise not, O man, the life beyond control,
Nor that which bows unto a tyrant's sway.
Know that the middle way
Is dearest unto God, and they thereon who wend,
They shall achieve the end;
But they who wander or to left or right
Are sinners in his sight.
Take to thy heart this one, this soothfast word—
Of wantonness impiety is sire;
Only from calm control and sanity unstirred
Cometh true weal, the goal of every man's desire.

antistrophe 3

Yea, whatsoe'er befall, hold thou this word of mine:
Bow down at Justice' shrine,
Turn thou thine eyes away from earthly lure,
Nor with a godless foot that altar spurn.
For as thou dost shall Fate do in return,
And the great doom is sure.
Therefore let each adore a parent's trust,
And each with loyalty revere the guest
That in his halls doth rest.

strophe 4

For whoso uncompelled doth follow what is just,
He ne'er shall be unblest;
Yea, never to the gulf of doom
That man shall come.

But he whose will is set against the gods,
Who treads beyond the law with foot impure,
Till o'er the wreck of Right confusion broods,—
Know that for him, though now he sail secure,
The day of storm shall be; then shall he strive and fail
Down from the shivered yard to furl the sail,

antistrophe 4

And call on Powers, that heed him nought, to save,
And vainly wrestle with the whirling wave.
Hot was his heart with pride—
I shall not fall, he cried.
But him with watching scorn
The god beholds, forlorn,
Tangled in toils of Fate beyond escape,
Hopeless of haven safe beyond the cape—
Till all his wealth and bliss of bygone day
Upon the reef of Rightful Doom is hurled,
And he is rapt away
Unwept, for ever, to the dead forgotten world.

(ATHENA *enters, with* TWELVE ATHENIAN CITIZENS. *A large crowd follows.*)

ATHENA

O herald, make proclaim, bid all men come.
Then let the shrill blast of the Tyrrhene trump,
Fulfilled with mortal breath, thro' the wide air
Peal a loud summons, bidding all men heed.
For, till my judges fill this judgment-seat,
Silence behoves,—that this whole city learn,
What for all time mine ordinance commands,
And these men, that the cause be judged aright.

(APOLLO *enters.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O king Apollo, rule what is thine own,
But in this thing what share pertains to thee?

APOLLO

First, as a witness come I, for this man
Is suppliant of mine by sacred right,
Guest of my holy hearth and cleansed by me
Of blood-guilt: then, to set me at his side
And in his cause bear part, as part I bore
Erst in his deed, whereby his mother fell.
Let whoso knoweth now announce the cause.

ATHENA (*to the* CHORUS)

'Tis I announce the cause—first speech be yours;
For rightfully shall they whose plaint is tried
Tell the tale first and set the matter clear.

LEADER

Though we be many, brief shall be our tale.
(*To* ORESTES)
Answer thou, setting word to match with word;
And first avow—hast thou thy mother slain?

ORESTES

I slew her. I deny no word hereof.

LEADER

Three falls decide the wrestle—this is one.

ORESTES

Thou vauntest thee—but o'er no final fall.

LEADER

Yet must thou tell the manner of thy deed.

ORESTES

Drawn sword in hand, I gashed her neck. 'Tis told.

LEADER

But by whose word, whose craft, wert thou impelled?

ORESTES

By oracles of him who here attests me.

LEADER

The prophet-god bade thee thy mother slay?

ORESTES

Yea, and thro' him less ill I fared, till now.

LEADER

If the vote grip thee, thou shalt change that word.

ORESTES

Strong is my hope; my buried sire shall aid.

LEADER

Go to now, trust the dead, a matricide!

ORESTES

Yea, for in her combined two stains of sin.

LEADER

How? speak this clearly to the judges' mind.

ORESTES

Slaying her husband, she did slay my sire.

LEADER

Therefore thou livest; death assoils her deed.

ORESTES

Then while she lived why didst thou hunt her not?

LEADER

She was not kin by blood to him she slew.

ORESTES

And I, am I by blood my mother's kin?

LEADER

O cursed with murder's guilt, how else wert thou
The burden of her womb? Dost thou forswear
Thy mother's kinship, closest bond of love?

ORESTES

It is thine hour, Apollo—speak the law,
Averring if this deed were justly done;
For done it is, and clear and undenied.
But if to thee this murder's cause seem right
Or wrongful, speak—that I to these may tell.

APOLLO

To you, Athena's mighty council-court,
Justly for justice will I plead, even I,
The prophet-god, nor cheat you by one word.
For never spake I from my prophet-seat

One word, of man, of woman, or of state,
Save what the Father of Olympian gods
Commanded unto me. I rede you then,
Bethink you of my plea, how strong it stands,
And follow the decree of Zeus our sire,—
For oaths prevail not over Zeus' command.

LEADER

Go to; thou sayest that from Zeus befell
The oracle that this Orestes bade
With vengeance quit the slaying of his sire,
And hold as nought his mother's right of kin!

APOLLO

Yea, for it stands not with a common death,
That he should die, a chieftain and a king
Decked with the sceptre which high heaven confers—
Die, and by female hands, not smitten down
By a far-shooting bow, held stalwartly
By some strong Amazon. Another doom
Was his: O Pallas, hear, and ye who sit
In judgment, to discern this thing aright!—
She with a specious voice of welcome true
Hailed him, returning from the mighty mart
Where war for life gives fame, triumphant home;
Then o'er the laver, as he bathed himself,
She spread from head to foot a covering net,
And in the endless mesh of cunning robes
Enwound and trapped her lord, and smote him down.
Lo, ye have heard what doom this chieftain met,
The majesty of Greece, the fleet's high lord:
Such as I tell it, let it gall your ears,
Who stand as judges to decide this cause.

LEADER

Zeus, as thou sayest, holds a father's death
As first of crimes,—yet he of his own act
Cast into chains his father, Cronus old:
How suits that deed with that which now ye tell?
O ye who judge, I bid ye mark my words!

APOLLO

O monsters loathed of all, O scorn of gods,
He that hath bound may loose: a cure there is,

Yea, many a plan that can unbind the chain.
But when the thirsty dust sucks up man's blood
Once shed in death, he shall arise no more.
No chant nor charm for this my Sire hath wrought.
All else there is, he moulds and shifts at will,
Not scant of strength nor breath, whate'er he do.

LEADER

Think yet, for what acquittal thou dost plead:
He who hath shed a mother's kindred blood,
Shall he in Argos dwell, where dwelt his sire?
How shall he stand before the city's shrines,
How share the clansmen's holy lustral bowl?

APOLLO

This too I answer; mark a soothfast word
Not the true parent is the woman's womb
That bears the child; she doth but nurse the seed
New-sown: the male is parent; she for him,
As stranger for a stranger, hoards the germ
Of life, unless the god its promise blight.
And proof hereof before you will I set.
Birth may from fathers, without mothers, be:
See at your side a witness of the same,
Athena, daughter of Olympian Zeus,
Never within the darkness of the womb
Fostered nor fashioned, but a bud more bright
Than any goddess in her breast might bear.
And I, O Pallas, howsoe'er I may,
Henceforth will glorify thy town, thy clan,
And for this end have sent my suppliant here
Unto thy shrine; that he from this time forth
Be loyal unto thee for evermore,
O goddess-queen, and thou unto thy side
Mayst win and hold him faithful, and his line,
And that for aye this pledge and troth remain
To children's children of Athenian seed.

ATHENA

Enough is said; I bid the judges now
With pure intent deliver just award.

LEADER

We too have shot our every shaft of speech,
And now abide to hear the doom of law.

ATHENA (*to* APOLLO *and* ORESTES)

Say, how ordaining shall I 'scape your blame?

APOLLO

I spake, ye heard; enough. O stranger men,
Heed well your oath as ye decide the cause.

ATHENA

O men of Athens, ye who first do judge
The law of bloodshed, hear me now ordain.
Here to all time for Aegeus' Attic host
Shall stand this council-court of judges sworn,
Here the tribunal, set on Ares' Hill
Where camped of old the tented Amazons,
What time in hate of Theseus they assailed
Athens, and set against her citadel
A counterwork of new sky-pointing towers,
And there to Ares held their sacrifice,
Where now the rock hath name, even Ares' Hill.
And hence shall Reverence and her kinsman Fear
Pass to each free man's heart, by day and night
Enjoining, *Thou shalt do no unjust thing,*
So long as law stands as it stood of old
Unmarred by civic change. Look you, the spring
Is pure; but foul it once with influx vile
And muddy clay, and none can drink thereof.
Therefore, O citizens, I bid ye bow
In awe to this command, *Let no man live*
Uncurbed by law nor curbed by tyranny;
Nor banish ye the monarchy of Awe
Beyond the walls; untouched by fear divine,
No man doth justice in the world of men.
Therefore in purity and holy dread
Stand and revere; so shall ye have and hold
A saving bulwark of the state and land,
Such as no man hath ever elsewhere known,
Nor in far Scythia, nor in Pelops' realm.
Thus I ordain it now, a council-court
Pure and unsullied by the lust of gain,
Sacred and swift to vengeance, wakeful ever

To champion men who sleep, the country's guard.
Thus have I spoken, thus to mine own clan
Commended it for ever. Ye who judge,
Arise, take each his vote, mete out the right,
Your oath revering. Lo, my word is said.

(*The twelve judges come forward, one by one, to the urns of decision; the first votes; as each of the others follows, the* LEADER *and* APOLLO *speak alternately.*)

LEADER

I rede ye well, beware! nor put to shame,
In aught, this grievous company of hell.

APOLLO

I too would warn you, fear mine oracles—
From Zeus they are,—nor make them void of fruit.

LEADER

Presumptuous is thy claim, blood-guilt to judge,
And false henceforth thine oracles shall be.

APOLLO

Failed then the counsels of my sire, when turned
Ixion, first of slayers, to his side?

LEADER

These are but words; but I, if justice fail me,
Will haunt this land in grim and deadly deed.

APOLLO

Scorn of the younger and the elder gods
Art thou: 'tis I that shall prevail anon.

LEADER

Thus didst thou too of old in Pheres' halls,
O'erreaching Fate to make a mortal deathless.[1]

APOLLO

Was it not well, my worshipper to aid,
Then most of all when hardest was the need?

LEADER

I say thou didst annul the lots of life,
Cheating with wine the deities of eld.

APOLLO

I say thou shalt anon, thy pleadings foiled,
Spit venom vainly on thine enemies.

LEADER

Since this young god o'errides mine ancient right,
I tarry but to claim your law, not knowing
If wrath of mine shall blast your state or spare.

ATHENA

Mine is the right to add the final vote,
And I award it to Orestes' cause.
For me no mother bore within her womb,
And, save for wedlock evermore eschewed,
I vouch myself the champion of the man,
Not of the woman, yea, with all my soul,—
In heart, as birth, a father's child alone.
Thus will I not too heinously regard
A woman's death who did her husband slay,
The guardian of her home; and if the votes
Equal do fall, Orestes shall prevail.

Ye of the judges who are named thereto,
Swiftly shake forth the lots from either urn.

(*Two judges come forward, one to each urn.*)

ORESTES

O bright Apollo, what shall be the end?

LEADER

O Night, dark mother mine, dost mark these things?

ORESTES

Now shall my doom be life, or strangling cords.

LEADER

And mine, lost honour or a wider sway.

APOLLO

O stranger judges, sum aright the count
Of votes cast forth, and, parting them, take heed
Ye err not in decision. The default
Of one vote only bringeth ruin deep,
One, cast aright, doth stablish house and home.

ATHENA

Behold, this man is free from guilt of blood,
For half the votes condemn him, half set free!

ORESTES

O Pallas, light and safety of my home,
Thou, thou hast given me back to dwell once more
In that my fatherland, amerced of which
I wandered; now shall Grecian lips say this,
The man is Argive once again, and dwells
Again within his father's wealthy hall,
By Pallas saved, by Loxias, and by Him,
The great third saviour, Zeus omnipotent—
Who thus in pity for my father's fate
Doth pluck me from my doom, beholding these,
Confederates of my mother. Lo, I pass
To mine own home, but proffering this vow
Unto thy land and people: *Nevermore,*
Thro' all the manifold years of Time to be,
Shall any chieftain of mine Argive land
Bear hitherward his spears for fight arrayed.
For we, though lapped in earth we then shall lie,
By thwart adversities will work our will
On them who shall transgress this oath of mine,
Paths of despair and journeyings ill-starred
For them ordaining, till their task they rue.
But if this oath be rightly kept, to them
Will we the dead be full of grace, the while
With loyal league they honour Pallas' town.
And now farewell, thou and thy city's folk—
Firm be thine arms' grasp, closing with thy foes,
And, strong to save, bring victory to thy spear.

(ORESTES *and* APOLLO *depart.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe on you, younger gods! the ancient right
Ye have o'erridden, rent it from my hands.

I am dishonoured of you, thrust to scorn!
But heavily my wrath
Shall on this land fling forth the drops that blast and burn,
Venom of vengeance, that shall work such scathe
As I have suffered; where that dew shall fall,

Shall leafless blight arise,
Wasting Earth's offspring,—Justice, hear my call!—
And thorough all the land in deadly wise
Shall scatter venom, to exude again
In pestilence on men.
What cry avails me now, what deed of blood,
Unto this land what dark despite?
Alack, alack, forlorn
Are we, a bitter injury have borne!
Alack, O sisters, O dishonoured brood
Of mother Night!

ATHENA

Nay, bow ye to my words, chafe not nor moan:
Ye are not worsted nor disgraced; behold,
With balanced vote the cause had issue fair,
Nor in the end did aught dishonour thee.
But thus the will of Zeus shone clearly forth,
And his own prophet-god avouched the same,
Orestes slew: his slaying is atoned.
Therefore I pray you, not upon this land
Shoot forth the dart of vengeance; be appeased,
Nor blast the land with blight, nor loose thereon
Drops of eternal venom, direful darts
Wasting and marring nature's seed of growth.
For I, the queen of Athens' sacred right,
Do pledge to you a holy sanctuary
Deep in the heart of this my land, made just
By your indwelling presence, while ye sit
Hard by your sacred shrines that gleam with oil
Of sacrifice, and by this folk adored.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

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Are we, a bitter injury have borne!
Alack, O sisters, O dishonoured brood
Of mother Night!

ATHENA

Dishonoured are ye not; turn not, I pray,
As goddesses your swelling wrath on men,
Nor make the friendly earth despiteful to them.
I too have Zeus for champion—'tis enough—
I only of all goddesses do know
To ope the chamber where his thunderbolts
Lie stored and sealed; but here is no such need.
Nay, be appeased, nor cast upon the ground
The malice of thy tongue, to blast the world;
Calm thou thy bitter wrath's black inward surge,
For high shall be thine honour, set beside me
For ever in this land, whose fertile lap
Shall pour its teeming firstfruits unto you,
Gifts for fair childbirth and for wedlock's crown:
Thus honoured, praise my spoken pledge for aye.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I, I dishonoured in this earth to dwell,—
Ancient of days and wisdom! I breathe forth
Poison and breath of frenzied ire. O Earth,
Woe, woe for thee, for me!
From side to side what pains be these that thrill?
Hearken, O mother Night, my wrath, mine agony!
Whom from mine ancient rights the gods have thrust,
And brought me to the dust—
Woe, woe is me!—with craft invincible.

ATHENA

Older art thou than I, and I will bear
With this thy fury. Know, although thou be
More wise in ancient wisdom, yet have I
From Zeus no scanted measure of the same,
Wherefore take heed unto this prophecy—
If to another land of alien men

Ye go, too late shall ye feel longing deep
For mine. The rolling tides of time bring round
A day of brighter glory for this town;
And thou, enshrined in honour by the halls
Where dwelt Erechtheus, shalt a worship win
From men and from the train of womankind,
Greater than any tribe elsewhere shall pay.
Cast thou not therefore on this soil of mine
Whetstones that sharpen souls to bloodshedding,
The burning goads of youthful hearts, made hot
With frenzy of the spirit, not of wine.
Nor pluck as 'twere the heart from cocks that strive,
To set it in the breast of citizens
Of mine, a war-god's spirit, keen for fight,
Made stern against their country and their kin.
The man who grievously doth lust for fame,
War, full, immitigable, let him wage
Against the stranger; but of kindred birds
I hold the challenge hateful. Such the boon
I proffer thee—within this land of lands,
Most loved of gods, with me to show and share
Fair mercy, gratitude and grace as fair.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I, I dishonoured in this earth to dwell,—
Ancient of days and wisdom! I breathe forth
Poison and breath of frenzied ire. O Earth,
Woe, woe for thee, for me!
From side to side what pains be these that thrill?
Hearken, O mother Night, my wrath, mine agony!
Whom from mine ancient rights the gods have thrust
And brought me to the dust—
Woe, woe is me!—with craft invincible.

ATHENA

I will not weary of soft words to thee,
That never mayst thou say, *Behold me spurned,*
An elder by a younger deity,
And from this land rejected and forlorn,
Unhonoured by the men who dwell therein.
But, if Persuasion's grace be sacred to thee,
Soft in the soothing accents of my tongue,
Tarry, I pray thee; yet, if go thou wilt,

Not rightfully wilt thou on this my town
Sway down the scale that beareth wrath and teen
Or wasting plague upon this folk. 'Tis thine,
If so thou wilt, inheritress to be
Of this my land, its utmost grace to win.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
O queen, what refuge dost thou promise me?

ATHENA
Refuge untouched by bale: take thou my boon.

LEADER
What, if I take it, shall mine honour be?

ATHENA
No house shall prosper without grace of thine.

LEADER
Canst thou achieve and grant such power to me?

ATHENA
Yea, for my hand shall bless thy worshippers.

LEADER
And wilt thou pledge me this for time eterne?

ATHENA
Yea: none can bid me pledge beyond my power.

LEADER
Lo, I desist from wrath, appeased by thee.

ATHENA
Then in the land's heart shalt thou win thee friends.

LEADER
What chant dost bid me raise, to greet the land?

ATHENA
Such as aspires towards a victory
Unrued by any: chants from breast of earth,
From wave, from sky; and let the wild winds' breath
Pass with soft sunlight o'er the lap of land,—
Strong wax the fruits of earth, fair teem the kine,
Unfailing, for my town's prosperity,
And constant be the growth of mortal seed.

But more and more root out the impious,
For as a gardener fosters what he sows,
So foster I this race, whom righteousness
Doth fend from sorrow. Such the proffered boon.
But I, if wars must be, and their loud clash
And carnage, for my town, will ne'er endure
That aught but victory shall crown her fame.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Lo, I accept it; at her very side
Doth Pallas bid me dwell:
I will not wrong the city of her pride,
Which even Almighty Zeus and Ares hold
Heaven's earthly citadel,
Loved home of Grecian gods, the young, the old,
The sanctuary divine,
The shield of every shrine!
For Athens I say forth a gracious prophecy,—
The glory of the sunlight and the skies
Shall bid from earth arise
Warm wavelets of new life and glad prosperity.

ATHENA (*chanting*)

Behold, with gracious heart well pleased
I for my citizens do grant
Fulfilment of this covenant:
And here, their wrath at length appeased,
These mighty deities shall stay.
For theirs it is by right to sway
The lot that rules our mortal day,
And he who hath not inly felt
Their stern decree, ere long on him,
Not knowing why and whence, the grim
Life-crushing blow is dealt.
The father's sin upon the child
Descends, and sin is silent death,
And leads him on the downward path,
By stealth beguiled,
Unto the Furies: though his state
On earth were high, and loud his boast,
Victim of silent ire and hate
He dwells among the Lost.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

To my blessing now give ear.—
Scorching blight nor singèd air
Never blast thine olives fair!
Drouth, that wasteth bud and plant,
Keep to thine own place. Avaunt,
Famine fell, and come not hither
Stealthily to waste and wither!
Let the land, in season due,
Twice her waxing fruits renew;
Teem the kine in double measure;
Rich in new god-given treasure;
Here let men the powers adore
For sudden gifts unhoped before!

ATHENA (*chanting*)

O hearken, warders of the wall
That guards mine Athens, what a dower
Is unto her ordained and given!
For mighty is the Furies' power,
And deep-revered in courts of heaven
And realms of hell; and clear to all
They weave thy doom, mortality!
And some in joy and peace shall sing;
But unto other some they bring
Sad life and tear-dimmed eye.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

And far away I ban thee and remove,
Untimely death of youths too soon brought low!
And to each maid, O gods, when time is come for love,
Grant ye a warrior's heart, a wedded life to know.
Ye too, O Fates, children of mother Night,
Whose children too are we, O goddesses
Of just award, of all by sacred right
Queens, who in time and in eternity
Do rule, a present power for righteousness,
Honoured beyond all Gods, hear ye and grant my cry!

ATHENA (*chanting*)

And I too, I with joy am fain,
Hearing your voice this gift ordain
Unto my land. High thanks be thine,
Persuasion, who with eyes divine

Into my tongue didst look thy strength,
To bend and to appease at length
Those who would not be comforted.
Zeus, king of parley, doth prevail,
And ye and I will strive nor fail,
That good may stand in evil's stead,
And lasting bliss for bale.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
And nevermore these walls within
Shall echo fierce sedition's din,
Unslaked with blood and crime;
The thirsty dust shall nevermore
Suck up the darkly streaming gore
Of civic broils, shed out in wrath
And vengeance, crying death for death!
But man with man and state with state
Shall vow *The pledge of common hate*
And common friendship, that for man
Hath oft made blessing out of ban,
Be ours unto all time.

ATHENA (*chanting*)
Skill they, or not, the path to find
Of favouring speech and presage kind?
Yea, even from these, who, grim and stern,
Glared anger upon you of old,
O citizens, ye now shall earn
A recompense right manifold.
Deck them aright, extol them high,
Be loyal to their loyalty,
And ye shall make your town and land
Sure, propped on Justice' saving hand,
And Fame's eternity.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Hail ye, all hail! and yet again, all hail,
O Athens, happy in a weal secured!
O ye who sit by Zeus' right hand, nor fail
Of wisdom set among you and assured,
Loved of the well-loved Goddess-Maid! the King
Of gods doth reverence you, beneath her guarding wing.

ATHENA (*chanting*)

All hail unto each honoured guest!
Whom to the chambers of your rest
'Tis mine to lead, and to provide
The hallowed torch, the guard and guide.
Pass down, the while these altars glow
With sacred fire, to earth below
And your appointed shrine.
There dwelling, from the land restrain
The force of fate, the breath of bane,
But waft on us the gift and gain
Of Victory divine!
And ye, the men of Cranaos' seed,
I bid you now with reverence lead
These alien Powers that thus are made
Athenian evermore. To you
Fair be their will henceforth, to do
Whate'er may bless and aid!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Hail to you all! hail yet again,
All who love Athens, gods and men,
Adoring her as Pallas' home!
And while ye reverence what ye grant—
My sacred shrine and hidden haunt—
Blameless and blissful be your doom!

ATHENA

Once more I praise the promise of your vows,
And now I bid the golden torches' glow
Pass down before you to the hidden depth
Of earth, by mine own sacred servants borne,
My loyal guards of statue and of shrine.
Come forth, O flower of Theseus' Attic land,
O glorious band of children and of wives,
And ye, O train of matrons crowned with eld!
Deck you with festal robes of scarlet dye
In honour of this day: O gleaming torch,
Lead onward, that these gracious powers of earth
Henceforth be seen to bless the life of men.

(ATHENA *leads the procession downwards into the Cave of the* FURIES, *now Eumenides, under the Areopagus: as they go, the escort of women and children chant aloud.*)

CHANT

With loyalty we lead you; proudly go,
Night's childless children, to your home below!
(*O citizens, awhile from words forbear!*)
To darkness' deep primeval lair,
Far in Earth's bosom, downward fare,
Adored with prayer and sacrifice.
(*O citizens, forbear your cries!*)
Pass hitherward, ye powers of Dread,
With all your former wrath allayed,
Into the heart of this loved land;
With joy unto your temple wend,
The while upon your steps attend
The flames that feed upon the brand—
(*Now, now ring out your chant, your joy's acclaim!*)
Behind them, as they downward fare,
Let holy hands libations bear,
And torches' sacred flame.
All-seeing Zeus and Fate come down
To battle fair for Pallas' town!
Ring out your chant, ring out your joy's acclaim!

NOTE FOR THE EUMENIDES

1. Apollo had agreed to spare the life of Admetus, the son of Pheres, provided that he could get someone to die in his stead. The legend is the subject of Euripides' *Alcestis*.

THE PLAYS OF SOPHOCLES

I

AJAX

Characters in the Play

Athena
Odysseus
Ajax
Chorus of Salaminians
Tecmessa, *concubine of* Ajax
Messenger
Teucer, *half-brother of* Ajax
Menelaus
Agamemnon

Mute Persons

Eurysaces, *child of* Ajax *and* Tecmessa
Attendants, Heralds, etc.

INTRODUCTION

SOPHOCLES' *Ajax,* probably the earliest of his extant plays, presents in dramatic form an episode derived from epic sources. The great Ajax, son of Telamon, figures in an important capacity in the *Iliad,* where he is consistently regarded as the most powerful Greek warrior after Achilles. The poet calls him the "bulwark of the Achaeans," and stresses frequently his physical and military prowess. This Homeric characterization has greatly influenced Sophocles in his portrayal of the hero. The particular events, however, which the dramatist treats in this play occurred in the interval between the periods covered by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* and consequently Sophocles must have relied upon material found in other poems of the epic cycle. The saga recorded that, after the death of Achilles, there was a contest to determine which of the Greek heroes should inherit his arms. Ajax and Odysseus were the leading contenders and the award ultimately fell to the latter, according to the decision of the Greek leaders. Ajax, thinking that his honour had been stained, set out at night to murder Agamemnon and Menelaus, who he felt were responsible for his ill-treatment. Athena, angry at Ajax because he had previously exhibited excessive pride and now was planning to do a deed of violence, sent madness upon him. In his frenzy, he turned upon the flocks of the army, slaughtered some of the beasts and led others to his tent, thinking that he was actually killing and torturing the Greek leaders themselves. Sophocles' play opens on the morning after Ajax has committed his insane acts.

The *Ajax* contains several excellent characterizations. Odysseus is revealed as almost comically timorous in the opening scene, and yet he exhibits great magnanimity at the close of the play. Athena embodies a rather uncompromising interpretation of the gods' power and their jealous ordering of human affairs. Sophocles has endowed Teucer with the quality of superb and unbending loyalty, while he makes Menelaus and Agamemnon thoroughly unsympathetic. Tecmessa, Ajax's devoted concubine, remains one of the most appealing female characters in Greek tragedy. Yet all these persons are subordinated to the portrayal of Ajax, who dominates the action. He is studied with great care, precisely at the mo-

ment when he has recovered his reason, and gradually becomes aware of what he has done. Later in the play his very inner being is revealed in his long speech to the Chorus composed of his followers. He preserves a magnificent ambiguity, so that they are comforted, yet there can be no doubt that the peace he seeks is the peace of death. The poet puts the finishing touches upon his portrait in Ajax's final speech before his death, where he calls down curses upon his enemies, but implicit in his words, here and in the former speech, is the thought that death, evil though it be, is the only solution for him, the only way whereby he can assume the responsibility for what he has done.

Critics have argued that the remaining third of the play after Ajax's death, in which the question at issue is whether or not his body shall receive ritual burial, does not grow naturally out of what has preceded. In attempting to meet this criticism, we must not forget that great importance was attached to the funeral rites among the Greeks, who believed that only by proper burial would the soul after death be freed from an eternity of homeless wandering. That the Greeks were preoccupied with this question is attested by the frequency with which the theme appears in their dramas. For example, Sophocles has made it central in his *Antigone.* In the *Ajax,* though perhaps the play's total artistic integration may leave something to be desired, the last part basically coheres with the earlier sections of the play because only by proper burial can Ajax as a person be worthily rehabilitated according to the Greek view. The final scenes of the *Ajax* are therefore necessary, to save the play from ending on a note of complete despair, which is never characteristic of true tragedy.

AJAX

(SCENE:—*Before the tent of* AJAX *in the Greek camp at Troy. It is dawn.* ODYSSEUS *is discovered examining the ground before the tent.* ATHENA *appears from above.*)

ATHENA

SON of Laertes, ever do I behold thee
Scheming to snatch some vantage o'er thy foes.
And now among the tents that guard the ships
Of Ajax, camped at the army's outmost verge,
Long have I watched thee hunting in his trail,
And scanning his fresh prints, to learn if now
He be within or forth. Skilled in the chase
Thou seemest, as a keen-nosed Spartan hound.
For the man but now has passed within, his face
And slaughterous hands streaming with sweat and blood.
No further need for thee to peer about
Inside these doors. But say what eager quest
Is thine, that I who know may give thee light.

ODYSSEUS

Voice of Athena, dearest of Gods to me,
How clearly, though thou be invisible,
Do I hear thy call, and seize it with my soul,
As when a bronze-mouthed Tyrrhene trumpet sounds!
Rightly thou judgest that on a foe's trail,
Broad-shielded Ajax, I range to and fro.
Him, and no other, I have long been tracking.
This very night against us he has wrought
A deed incredible, if in truth 'tis he.
For we know nothing sure, but drift in doubt.
Gladly I assumed the burden of this task.
For not long since we found that our whole spoil
Had been destroyed, both herds and flocks, slaughtered

By some man's hand, their guardians dead beside them.
Now 'tis on him that all men lay this guilt:
And a scout who had seen him swiftly bounding
Across the plain alone with reeking sword,
Informed me and bore witness. I forthwith,
Darting in hot chase, now pick out his tracks,
But now, bewildered, know not whose they are.
Timely thou comest. As in past days, so
In days to come I am guided by thy hand.

ATHENA

I know it, Odysseus: so on the path betimes
A sentinel friendly to thy chase I came.

ODYSSEUS

Dear mistress, do I labour to good purpose?

ATHENA

Know 'twas by yonder man these deeds were wrought.

ODYSSEUS

And why did he so brandish a frenzied hand?

ATHENA

In grievous wrath for Achilles' panoply.

ODYSSEUS

Why then upon the flocks did he make this onslaught?

ATHENA

Your blood he deemed it was that stained his hand.

ODYSSEUS

Was this outrage designed against the Greeks?

ATHENA

He had achieved it too, but for my vigilance.

ODYSSEUS

What bold scheme could inspire such reckless daring?

ATHENA

By night he meant to steal on you alone.

ODYSSEUS

Did he come near us? Did he reach his goal?

ATHENA

He stood already at the two chiefs' doors.

ODYSSEUS

What then withheld his eager hand from bloodshed?

ATHENA

'Twas I restrained him, casting on his eyes
O'ermastering notions of that baneful ecstasy,
That turned his rage on flocks and mingled droves
Of booty yet unshared, guarded by herdsmen.
Then plunging amid the thronging horns he slew,
Smiting on all sides; and one while he fancied
The Atreidae were the captives he was slaughtering,
Now 'twas some other chief on whom he fell.
And I, while thus he raved in maniac throes,
Urged him on, drove him into the baleful toils.
Thereafter, when he had wearied of such labours,
He bound with thongs such oxen as yet lived,
With all the sheep, and drove them to his tents,
As though his spoil were men, not hornèd cattle.
Now lashed together in the hut he tortures them.
But to thee too will I expose this madness,
That seeing thou mayst proclaim it to all the Greeks.
Boldly await him here, nor apprehend
Mischance; for I will turn aside his eyes,
Foiling his vision lest he see thy face.
(*She calls to* AJAX *within the tent.*)
Hearken, thou who art pinioning with cords
The wrists of captives; hither, I bid thee, come.
Thou, Ajax, hear me: come to thy tent's door.

ODYSSEUS

What dost thou, Athena? Do not summon him forth.

ATHENA

Abide in silence. Earn not the name of coward.

ODYSSEUS

Nay, by the Gods, let him remain within.

ATHENA

What dost thou dread? Was he not once a man?

ODYSSEUS
Yes, and to me a foeman, and still is.

ATHENA
To mock foes, is not that the sweetest mockery?

ODYSSEUS
I am content he should remain indoors.

ATHENA
To look upon a madman art thou afeard?

ODYSSEUS
Had he been sane, no fear had made me shrink.

ATHENA
Even now he shall not see thee, near as thou art.

ODYSSEUS
How so, if still with the same eyes he sees?

ATHENA
His orbs will I make dark, though vision is theirs.

ODYSSEUS
Well, all is possible, when 'tis a god contrives.

ATHENA
Stand then silent, abiding as thou art.

ODYSSEUS
Stay I must; yet I fain would be far hence.

ATHENA
Ho, Ajax! Once again I summon thee.
So slight is thy regard for thine ally?
(AJAX *appears in the tent door, with a blood-stained scourge in his hand.*)

AJAX
Oh hail, Athena! Hail thou Zeus-born maid!
Nobly hast thou stood by me. Now will I crown thee
With trophies all of gold for this rich conquest.

ATHENA
Thy words are welcome. But now tell me this:
Hast thou dyed well thy sword in the Argive host?

AJAX

Such vaunt is mine. I disclaim not that glory.

ATHENA

Against the Atreidae didst thou arm thy hand?

AJAX

So that Ajax nevermore shall they insult.

ATHENA

The men are dead, if rightly I take thy meaning.

AJAX

Yes, dead. Now let them rob me of my arms.

ATHENA

'Tis well. And what then of Laertes' son?
In what plight does he stand? Or has he escaped thee?

AJAX

Wouldst thou know where is that accursèd fox?

ATHENA

Even so—Odysseus, thine old adversary.

AJAX

Goddess, a most dear captive in my tent
He sits. I do not mean him to die yet.

ATHENA

Till thou hast done what, gained what further vantage?

AJAX

Till bound fast to a pillar beneath my roof—

ATHENA

What evil wilt thou inflict on the poor wretch?

AJAX

His back the scourge must crimson ere he dies.

ATHENA

Nay, do not torture so the wretched man.

AJAX

Athena, in all else will I do thy will;
But his shall be no other doom than this.

ATHENA

Thou then, since thy delight is to act thus,
Smite, spare not, abate nought of thy intent.

AJAX

To my work I return: and thus I charge thee,
As now, so always fight thou upon my side.
(AJAX *goes back into the tent.*)

ATHENA

Seest thou, Odysseus, how great the strength of gods?
Whom couldst thou find more prudent than this man,
Or whom in act more valiant, when need called?

ODYSSEUS

I know none nobler; and I pity him
In his misery, albeit he is my foe,
Since he is yoked fast to an evil doom.
My own lot I regard no less than his.
For I see well, nought else are we but mere
Phantoms, all we that live, mere fleeting shadows.

ATHENA

Warned therefore by his fate, never do thou
Thyself utter proud words against the gods;
Nor swell with insolence, if thou shouldst vanquish
Some rival by main strength or by wealth's power.
For a day can bring all mortal greatness low,
And a day can lift it up. But the gods love
The wise of heart, the froward they abhor.

(ATHENA *vanishes and* ODYSSEUS *departs. The* CHORUS OF SALAMINIANS *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Son of Telamon, lord of Salamis' isle,
On its wave-washed throne mid the breaking sea,
I rejoice when fair are thy fortunes:
But whene'er thou art smitten by the stroke of Zeus,
Or the vehement blame of the fierce-tongued Greeks,
Then sore am I grieved, and for fear I quake,
As a fluttering dove with a scared eye.
Even so by rumour murmuring loud
Of the night late-spent our ears are assailed.
'Tis a tale of shame, how thou on the plains

Where the steeds roam wild, didst ruin the Danaan
Flocks and herds,
Our spear-won booty as yet unshared,
With bright sword smiting and slaughtering.
Such now are the slanders Odysseus forges
And whispers abroad into all men's ears,
Winning easy belief: so specious the tale
He is spreading against thee; and each new hearer
Rejoices more than he who told,
Exulting in thy degradation.
For the shaft that is aimed at the noble of soul
Smites home without fail: but whoe'er should accuse *me*
Of such misdeeds, no faith would he win.
'Tis the stronger whom creeping jealousy strikes.
Yet small men reft of help from the mighty
Can ill be trusted to guard their walls.
Best prosper the lowly in league with the great;
And the great have need to be served by the less.
But none to the knowledge of such plain truths
May lead minds witless and froward.
Even such are the men who murmur against thee:
And vainly without thine aid, O King,
We strive to repel their accusing hate.
For whene'er they are safe from the scorn of thy glance,
They chatter and screech like bids in a flock:
But smitten with dread of the powerful vulture,
Doubtless at once, should'st thou but appear,
They will cower down dumbly in silence.

strophe

Was it the Tauric Olympian Artemis,
(Oh, the dread rumour of woe,
Parent of my grievous shame!)
Who drove thee forth to slaughter the herds of the people,
In wrath perchance for some unpaid-for victory,
Whether defrauded of glorious spoil, or offerings
Due for a stag that was slain?
Or did the bronze-clad Demon of battle, aggrieved
On him who scorned the might of his succouring spear,
Plot revenge by nightly deception?

antistrophe

Ne'er of itself had thy heart, son of Telamon,
Strayed into folly so far

As to murder flocks and herds.
Escape from heaven-sent madness is none: yet Apollo
And Zeus avert these evil rumours of the Greeks.
But should the story be false, these crafty slanders
Spread by the powerful kings,
And by the child of the infamous Sisyphid line,
No more, my master, thus in the tent by the sea
Hide thy countenance, earning an ill fame.

epode

Nay, but arise from thy seat, where'er so long wrapt in
Brooding pause from the battle thou hast lurked: arise,
Heaven-high kindle the flame of death.
But the insolence of thy foes boldly
Thus wanders abroad in the wind-swept glens.
Meanwhile all men mocking
With venomous tongues taunt thee:
But grief in my heart wanes not.

(TECMESSA *enters. The following lines between* TECMESSA *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

TECMESSA

Liegemen of Ajax, ship-companions,
Ye children of earth-sprung Erechthid race,
Lamentation is now our portion, to whom
Dear is the far-off house of Telamon,
Now that the stern and terrible Ajax
Lies whelmed by a storm
Of turbid wildering fury.

CHORUS

To what evil change from the day's woe now
Has night given birth?
Thou daughter of Phrygian Teleutas, speak;
For a constant love has valiant Ajax
Borne thee, his spear-won prisoner bride.
Then hide from us nought that thou knowest.

TECMESSA

How to utter a tale of unspeakable things!
For disastrous as death is the hap you will hear.
In the darkness of night madness has seized
Our glorious Ajax: he is ruined and lost.
Hereof in the tent may proof be seen;

Sword-slain victims in their own blood bathed,
By his hand sacrificially slaughtered.

CHORUS

strophe

What tidings of the fiery warrior tellest thou,
Not to be borne, nor yet to be disputed,
Rumoured abroad by the chiefs of the Danaan host,
Mightily still spreading and waxing!
Woe's me! I dread the horror to come. Yea, to a public death doomed
Will he die, if in truth *his* be the hand that wielded
The red sword that in frenzy hath slain the herds and mounted herdsmen.

TECMESSA

Ah me! Thence was it, thence that he came to me
Leading his captive flock from the pastures!
Thereof in the tent some did he slaughter,
Others hewed he asunder with slashing sword;
Then he caught up amain two white-footed rams,
Sliced off from the one both the head and the tongue,
And flings them away;
But the other upright to a pillar he binds,
Then seizing a heavy horse-harnessing thong
He smites with the whistling doubled lash,
Uttering fierce taunts which an evil fiend
No mere mortal could have taught him.

CHORUS

antistrophe

'Tis time that nów eách with shamefully muffled head
Forth from the camp should creep with stealthy footsteps.
Nay, on the ship let us muster, and benched at the oars
Over the waves launch her in swift flight.
Such angry threats sound in our ears hurled by the brother princes,
The Atreidae: and I quake, fearing a death by stoning,
The dread portion of all who would share our hapless master's ruin.

TECMESSA

Yet hope we: for ceased is the lightning's flash:
His rage dies down like a fierce south-wind.
But now, grown sane, new misery is his;

For on woes self-wrought he gazes aghast,
Wherein no hand but his own had share;
And with anguish his soul is afflicted.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, if 'tis ceased, there is good cause to hope.
Once 'tis past, of less moment is his frenzy.

TECMESSA

And which, were the choice thine, wouldst thou prefer,
To afflict thy friends and feel delight thyself,
Or to share sorrow, grieving with their grief?

LEADER

The twofold woe, lady, would be the greater.

TECMESSA

Then we, though plagued no more, are undone now.

LEADER

What mean thy words? Their sense is dark to me.

TECMESSA

Yonder man, while his spirit was diseased,
Himself had joy in his own evil plight,
Though to us, who were sane, he brought distress.
But now, since he has respite from his plague,
He with sore grief is utterly cast down,
And we likewise, no less than heretofore.
Are there not here two woes instead of one?

LEADER

Yes truly. And I fear, from some god came
This stroke; how else? if, now his frenzy is ceased,
His mind has no more ease than when it raged.

TECMESSA

'Tis even as I said, rest well assured.

LEADER

But how did this bane first alight upon him?
To us who share thy grief show what befell.

TECMESSA

Thou shalt hear all, as though thou hadst been present.
In the middle of the night, when the evening braziers

No longer flared, he took a two-edged sword,
And fain would sally upon an empty quest.
But I rebuked him, saying: "What doest thou,
Ajax? Why thus uncalled wouldst thou go forth?
No messenger has summoned thee, no trumpet
Roused thee. Nay, the whole camp is sleeping still."
But curtly he replied in well-worn phrase:
"Woman, silence is the grace of woman."
Thus schooled, I yielded; and he rushed out alone.
What passed outside the tent, I cannot tell.
But in he came, driving lashed together
Bulls, and shepherd dogs, and fleecy prey.
Some he beheaded, the wrenched-back throats of some
He slit, or cleft their chines; others he bound
And tortured, as though men they were, not beasts.
Last, darting through the doors, as to some phantom
He tossed words, now against the Atreidae, now
Taunting Odysseus, piling up huge jeers
Of how he had gone and wreaked his scorn upon them.
Soon he rushed back within the tent, where slowly
And hardly to his reason he returned.
And gazing round on the room filled with havoc,
He struck his head and cried out; then amidst
The wrecks of slaughtered sheep a wreck he fell,
And sat clutching his hair with tight-clenched nails.
There first for a long while he crouched speechless;
Then did he threaten me with fearful threats,
If I revealed not all that had befallen him,
Asking what meant the plight wherein he lay.
And I, friends, terror-stricken, told him all
That had been done, so far as I had knowledge.
Forthwith he broke forth into bitter wailing,
Such as I ne'er had heard from him before
For always had he held that such laments
Befitted cowards only, and low-souled men:
But uttering no shrill cries, he would express
His grief in low groans, as of a moaning bull.
But now prostrate beneath so great a woe,
Not tasting food nor drink, he sits among
The sword-slain beasts, motionless where he sank.
And plainly he meditates some baleful deed,
For so portend his words and lamentations.
But, O friends!—'twas for this cause I came forth—

Enter and help, if help at all you can:
For by friends' words men so bestead are won.

LEADER

Child of Teleutas, fearful are thy tidings,
That our prince has been maddened by his griefs.

AJAX (*within*)

Alas! Woe, woe!

TECMESSA

Soon, I fear, worse will follow. Heard you not?
'Twas Ajax. Oh, how dreadful was that cry.

AJAX

Alas! Woe, woe!

LEADER

He seems either still frenzied, or else grieving
For his past frenzies, now he sees their work.

AJAX

Alas! My son, my son!

TECMESSA

Woe's me! Eurysaces, 'tis for thee he calls.
What can he purpose?—Where art thou?—Ah, woe!

AJAX

Teucer, come!—Where is Teucer? Will he never
Come back from cattle-raiding?—while I perish!

LEADER

He seems in his right mind. But open the doors.
Perhaps even the sight of me may sober him.

(*She opens the doors of the tent.* AJAX *is revealed sitting among the slain beasts.*)

TECMESSA

See, I have opened. You may now behold
What he has done, and in what plight he lies.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Alas!
My shipmates and friends, you that alone to me
Loyal and true remain, of all friends alone,

Behold how great a billow lately rising from the storm of blood
Surging around engulphs me!

LEADER

Ah me, too true, it seems, was thy report.
This sight reveals the work of no sane mind.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Alas!
My mates, skilled and tried in brave seamanship,
Ye who embarking drove the wave-cleaving oar,
In you, in you alone I see a help and refuge from despair.
Smite me, and spill my blood too.

LEADER

Keep silence from dread words; nor curing ill
By ill, so swell the misery of this curse.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Behold now the bold, the man stout of heart,
Who ne'er shrank in fight agáinst fóes—behold
How I have spent my rage on beasts that feared no harm!
Ah me, the mockery! To what shame am I brought low!

TECMESSA

Ajax, my master, I entreat thee, speak not so.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Away hence, I command thee! Take thyself elsewhere.
Aiai! Aiai!

LEADER

Oh, by the Gods, we pray thee, yield to wisdom's voice.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Oh, wretch that I was to allow
Those cursèd foes to slip from my hands, and assaulting
Hornèd kine and goodly flocks, madly to spill
Their life in streams of dark blood!

LEADER

Why still be afflicted, now the deed is done past cure?
Never can these things be as though they had not been.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Thou áll-spýing knave, of áll deéds of shame
The prompt, easy tool, Odysseus the wise!

Villain, of all the camp the most foul and vile!
Huge laughter doubtless shakes thee now for sheer delight.

LEADER

As God appoints, so every man laughs or laments.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Would I might meet him, crushed and broken though I be.
Alas! Woe, woe!

LEADER

Speak no proud words. Seest thou not to what woe thou art sunk?

AJAX (*chanting*)

O Zeus, of my fathers the sire,
Might I but kill that hateful and crafty dissembler,
Yea, and those two brother kings, partners in pride,
Then last myself too perish!

TECMESSA

If thus thou prayest, pray therewith for me, that I
Die with thee. Why, when thou art dead, should I live on?

AJAX (*chanting*)

Alas!
Shadow that art my light!
Erebus, oh to me verily bright as day!
Receive, receive me yóur hábitant.
Receive me now no more worthy to seek help of the gods,
Nor any more from fellow mortal men to claim kindness:
No, but she the strong
Zeus-born deity
Miserably tortures me.
Whither should I then flee?
Whither seek for rest?
Since my former glory is gone, my friends,
With yonder victims, yonder spoils by frenzy won,
Since all the host with swords uplifted
Sternly would slay me.

TECMESSA

Ah, woe is me! from such a noble warrior
To hear such words as once he ne'er had deigned to speak!

AJAX (*chanting*)

Alas!
Billowy paths of foam,
Eddying caves, and ye coppices by the shore,
A weary, weary time tarrying here
Beneath the walls of Troy me have you kept, but from this hour
Alive you shall not keep me. Truth I speak: let none doubt it.
O Scamander's wave,
Stream whose neighbouring flow
Oft have the Argives blest,
Never, nevermore
Me shall you behold,
Me (a proud word will I utter now)
Whose peer in battle Troy has never seen yet come
From Hellas' land: but now dishonoured
Thus am I prostrate.

LEADER

In truth I know not how to restrain thy speech, nor yet
To suffer it; so grievous is thy couch of woe.

AJAX

Aiai! [1] Who ever would have thought my name
Would harmonise so aptly with my woes?
For now well may I wail that sound out twice,
Yea thrice; such woeful destinies are mine,
Whose father from this land of Ida won
Fame's noblest guerdon over the whole host,
And crowned with praises only sailed back home; [2]
But I, his son, who to the self-same Troy
Came after him, in might no less than he,
Nor rendering meaner service by my deeds,
Dishonoured by the Argives perish thus.
Yet this methinks I know for truth, were now
Achilles living and called on to adjudge
As the award of valour his own arms,
No man's hand would have grasped them before mine.
But now the Atreidae to a scheming knave
Have dealt them, thrusting by my valiant deeds.
And if these eyes, these wits had not in frenzy
Swerved from my purpose, never would they thus
Pervert judgment against another man.
But the irresistible fierce-eyed goddess, even

As I was arming my right hand to slay them,
Foiled me, smiting me with a maddening plague,
So that I stained my hand butchering these cattle.
Thus my foes mock me, escaped beyond my reach,
Through no goodwill of mine: but if a god
Thwart vengeance, even the base may escape the nobler.
And what should I now do, who manifestly
To Heaven am hateful; whom the Greeks abhor,
Whom every Trojan hates, and this whole land?
Shall I desert the beached ships, and abandoning
The Atreidae, sail home o'er the Aegean sea?
With what face shall I appear before my father
Telamon? How will *he* find heart to look
On me, stripped of my championship in war,
That mighty crown of fame that once was his?
No, that I dare not. Shall I then assault
Troy's fortress, and alone against them all
Achieve some glorious exploit and then die?
No, I might gratify the Atreidae thus.
That must not be. Some scheme let me devise
Which may prove to my aged sire that I,
His son, at least by nature am no coward.
For 'tis base for a man to crave long life
Who endures never-varying misery.
What joy can be in day that follows day,
Bringing us close then snatching us from death?
As of no worth would I esteem that man
Who warms himself with unsubstantial hopes.
Nobly to live, or else nobly to die
Befits proud birth. There is no more to say.

LEADER

The word thou hast uttered, Ajax, none shall call
Bastard, but the true offspring of thy soul.
Yet pause. Let those who love thee overrule
Thy resolution. Put such thoughts aside.

TECMESSA

O my lord Ajax, of all human ills
Greatest is fortune's wayward tyranny.
Of a free father was I born the child,
One rich and great as any Phrygian else.
Now am I a slave; for so the gods, or rather

Thy warrior's hand, would have it. Therefore since
I am thy bedfellow, I wish thee well,
And I entreat thee by domestic Zeus,
And by the embraces that have made me thine,
Doom me not to the cruel taunts of those
Who hate thee, left a bond-slave in strange hands.
For shouldst thou perish and forsake me in death,
That very day assuredly I too
Shall be seized by the Argives, with thy son
To endure henceforth the portion of a slave.
Then one of my new masters with barbed words
Shall wound me scoffing: "See the concubine
Of Ajax, who was mightiest of the host,
What servile tasks are hers who lived so daintily!"
Thus will men speak, embittering my hard lot,
But words of shame for thee and for thy race.
Nay, piety forbid thee to forsake
Thy father in his drear old age—thy mother
With her sad weight of years, who many a time
Prays to the gods that thou come home alive.
And pity, O king, thy son, who without thee
To foster his youth, must live the orphaned ward
Of loveless guardians. Think how great a sorrow
Dying thou wilt bequeath to him and me.
For I have nothing left to look to more
Save thee. By thy spear was my country ravaged;
And by another stroke did fate lay low
My mother and my sire to dwell with Hades.
Without thee then what fatherland were mine?
What wealth? On thee alone rests all my hope.
O take thought for me too. Do we not owe
Remembrance, where we have met with any joy?
For kindness begets kindness evermore
But he who from whose mind fades the memory
Of benefits, noble is he no more.

LEADER

Ajax, would that thy soul would feel compassion,
As mine does; so wouldst thou approve her words.

AJAX

Verily my approval shall she win,
If only she find heart to do my bidding.

TECMESSA
Dear Ajax, in all things will I obey.

AJAX
Then bring me here my son, for I would see him.

TECMESSA
Nay, but I sent him from me in my fears.

AJAX
During my late affliction, is that thy meaning?

TECMESSA
Lest by ill chance he should meet thee and so perish.

AJAX
Yes, that would have been worthy of my fate.

TECMESSA
That at least I was watchful to avert.

AJAX
I praise thine act and the foresight thou hast shown.

TECMESSA
Since that is so, what shall I do to serve thee?

AJAX
Let me speak to him and behold his face.

TECMESSA
He is close by in the attendants' charge.

AJAX
Why is his coming then so long delayed?

TECMESSA (*calling*)
My son, thy father calls thee.—Bring him thither
Whichever of you is guiding the child's steps.

AJAX
Is the man coming? Has he heard thy call?

TECMESSA
See, he is here already with the child.
(*An attendant enters, leading the child,* EURYSACES.)

AJAX

Lift him up, lift him hither. He will not shrink
In terror at sight of yonder new-spilt blood,
If he be rightly mine, his father's son.
Early must he be broken to his sire's
Stern rugged code, and grow like-natured with him.
O son, mayst thou prove happier than thy father,
In all else like him, and thou'lt prove not base.
Yet even now might I envy thee herein,
That of these woes thou hast no sense at all.
For the life that is unconscious is most sweet—
Until we learn what joy and sorrow are.
But that once learnt, then midst thy father's foes
Thou must show what thou art, and of what breed.
Till then be nurtured on soft airs, cherishing
Thy tender life, and be thy mother's joy.
None of the Greeks, I know, will do thee wrong
With cruel outrage, even though I be gone.
So trusty a guardian will I leave thee, Teucer,
Who will not stint his loving care, though now
He is gone far away, in chase of foes.
But you, my warriors, comrades in seafaring,
On you too I impose this task of love;
And fail not to announce my will to Teucer,
That to my home he take the child and show him
To Telamon and my mother Eriboea,
That henceforth he may comfort their old age.
And charge him that no game-steward make my arms
A prize for the Greeks—nor he who ruined me.
But this take thou, my son Eurysaces;
Hold it and wield it by its firm-stitched thong,
This sevenfold spear-proof shield, whence comes thy name.
But else with me my arms shall be interred.
(*Speaking now to* TECMESSA)
Come, take the child hence quickly, and bolt the doors:
And let there be no weeping and lamenting
Before the hut. Women love tears too well.
Close quickly. It is not for a skilful leech
To drone charms o'er a wound that craves the knife.

LEADER

I am fearful, listening to this eager mood.
The sharp edge of thy tongue, I like it not.

TECMESSA

O my lord Ajax, what art thou purposing?

AJAX

Question me not. To be discreet is best.

TECMESSA

Ah me, heavy is my heart. Now by thy child,
By the gods, I entreat, forsake us not.

AJAX

Vex me no further. Know'st thou not that I
To the gods owe no duty any more?

TECMESSA

Utter no proud words.

AJAX

Speak to those who listen.

TECMESSA

Wilt thou not heed?

AJAX

Too much thou hast spoken already.

TECMESSA

Yes, through my fears, O king.

AJAX

Close the doors quickly.

TECMESSA

For the gods' love, relent.

AJAX

'Tis a foolish hope,
If thou shouldst now propose to school my mood.

(*The doors are closed upon* AJAX. TECMESSA *goes out with* EURYSACES.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O famed Salamis, thou amidst
Breaking surges abidest ever
Blissful, a joy to the eyes of all men.
But I the while long and wearily tarrying

Through countless months still encamped on the fields of Ida
In misery here have made my couch,
By time broken and worn,
In dread waiting the hour
When I shall enter at last the terrible shadow abode of Hades.

antistrophe 1

Now dismays me a new despair,
This incurable frenzy (woe, ah
Woe's me!) cast by the gods on Ajax,
Whom thou of old sentest forth from thy shores, a strong
And valiant chief; but now, to his friends a sore grief,
Devouring his lonely heart he sits.
His once glorious deeds
Are now fallen and scorned,
Fallen to death without love from the loveless and pitiless sons of Atreus.

strophe 2

His mother, 'tis most like, burdened with many days,
And whitened with old age, when she shall hear how frenzy
Has smitten his soul to ruin,
Ailinon! ailinon!
Will break forth her despair, not as the nightingale's
Plaintive, tender lament, no, but in passion's wailing
Shrill-toned cries; and with fierce strokes
Wildly smiting her bosom,
In grief's anguish her hands will rend her grey locks.

antistrophe 2

Yea, better Hell should hide one who is sick in soul,
Though there be none than he sprung from a nobler lineage
Of the war-weary Greeks, yet
Strayed from his inbred mood
Now amidst alien thoughts dwells he a stranger.
Hapless father! alas, bitter the tale that waits thee,
Thy son's grievous affliction.
No life save his alone
Of Aeacid kings such a curse has ever haunted.

(AJAX *enters, carrying a sword. As he speaks,* TECMESSA *also enters.*)

AJAX

All things the long and countless lapse of time
Brings forth, displays, then hides once more in gloom.

Nought is too strange to look for; but the event
May mock the sternest oath, the firmest will.
Thus I, who late so strong, so stubborn seemed
Like iron dipped, yet now grow soft with pity
Before this woman, whom I am loath to leave
Midst foes a widow with this orphaned child.
But I will seek the meadows by the shore:
There will I wash and purge these stains, if so
I may appease Athena's heavy wrath.
Then will I find some lonely place, where I
May hide this sword, beyond all others cursed,
Buried where none may see it, deep in earth.
May night and Hades keep it there below.
For from that hour my hand accepted it,[8]
The gift of Hector, deadliest of my foes,
Nought from the Greeks towards me hath sped well.
So now I find that ancient proverb true,
Foes' gifts are no gifts: profit bring they none.
Therefore henceforth I study to obey
The Gods, and reverence the sons of Atreus.
Our rulers are they: we must yield. How else?
For to authority yield all things most dread
And mighty. Thus must Winter's snowy feet
Give place to Summer with her wealth of fruits;
And from her weary round doth Night withdraw,
That Day's white steeds may kindle heaven with light.
After fierce tempest calm will ever lull
The moaning sea; and Sleep, that masters all,
Binds life awhile, yet loosens soon the bond.
And who am I that I should not learn wisdom?
Of all men I, whom proof hath taught of late
How so far only should we hate our foes
As though we soon might love them, and so far
Do a friend service, as to one most like
Some day to prove our foe; since oftenest men
In friendship but a faithless haven find.
Thus well am I resolved. (*To* TECMESSA) Thou, woman, pass
Within, and pray the gods that all things so
May be accomplished as my heart desires.
And you, friends, heed my wishes as she doth;
And when he comes, bid Teucer he must guard
My rights at need, and withal stand your friend.
For now I go whither I needs must pass.

Do as I bid. Soon haply you shall hear,
With me, for all this misery, 'tis most well.

(AJAX *departs.* TECMESSA *goes into the tent.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

I thrill with rapture, flutter on wings of ecstasy.
Io, Io, Pan, Pan!
O Pan, Pan! from the stony ridge,
Snow-bestrewn of Cyllene's height
Appear roving across the waters,
O dance-ordering king of gods,
That thou mayst join me in flinging free
Fancy measures of Nysa and of Cnossus.
Yea for the dance I now am eager.
And over the far Icarian billows come, O king Apollo,
From Delos in haste, come thou,
Thy kindly power here in our midst revealing.

antistrophe

Ares hath lifted horror and anguish from our eyes.
Io, Io! Now again,
Now, O Zeus, can the bright and blithe
Glory of happier days return
To our swift-voyaging ships, for now
Hath Ajax wholly forgot his grief,
And all rites due to the gods he now
Fain would meetly perform with loyal worship.
Mighty is time to dwindle all things.
Nought would I call too strange for belief, when Ajax thus beyond hope
Hath learnt to repent his proud feuds,
And lay aside anger against the Atreidae.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

My friends, these tiding I would tell you first:
Teucer is present, from the Mysian heights
But now returned, and in the central camp
By all the Greeks at once is being reviled.
As he drew near they knew him from afar,
Then gathering around him one and all
With taunts assailed him from this side and that,
Calling him kinsman of that maniac,

That plotter against the host, saying that nought
Should save him; stoned and mangled he must die.
And so they had come to such a pitch that swords
Plucked from their sheaths stood naked in men's hands.
Yet when the strife ran highest, it was stayed
By words from the elders and so reconciled.
But where is Ajax? I must speak with him.
He whom it most concerns must be told all.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

He is not within, but has just now gone forth
With a new purpose yoked to a new mood.

MESSENGER

Alas! Alas!
Then too late on this errand was I sped
By him who sent me; or I have proved too slow.

LEADER

What urgent need has been neglected here?

MESSENGER

Teucer forbade that Ajax should go forth
Outside his hut, till he himself should come.

LEADER

Well, he is gone. To wisest purpose now
His mind is turned, to appease heaven's wrath.

MESSENGER

These words of thine are filled with utter folly,
If there was truth in Calchas' prophecy.

LEADER

What prophecy? And what know you of this thing?

MESSENGER

Thus much I know, for by chance I was present.
Leaving the circle of consulting chiefs
Where sat the Atreidae, Calchas went aside,
And with kind purpose grasping Teucer's hand
Enjoined him that by every artifice
He should restrain Ajax within his tents
This whole day, and not leave him to himself,
If he wished ever to behold him alive.
For on this day alone, such were his words,

Would the wrath of divine Athena vex him.
For the overweening and unprofitable
Fall crushed by heaven-sent calamities
(So the seer spoke), whene'er one born a man
Has conceived thoughts too high for man's estate:
And this man, when he first set forth from home,
Showed himself foolish, when his father spoke to him
Wisely: "My son, seek victory by the spear;
But seek it always with the help of heaven."
Then boastfully and witlessly he answered:
"Father, with heaven's help a mere man of nought
Might win victory: but I, albeit without
Their aid, trust to achieve a victor's glory."
Such was his proud vaunt. Then a second time
Answering divine Athena, when she urged him
To turn a slaughterous hand upon his foes,
He gave voice to this dire, blasphemous boast:
"Goddess, stand thou beside the other Greeks.
Where I am stationed, no foe shall break through."
By such words and such thoughts too great for man
Did he provoke Athena's pitiless wrath.
But if he lives through this one day, perchance,
Should heaven be willing, we may save him yet.
So spoke the seer; and Teucer from his seat
No sooner risen, sent me with this mandate
For you to observe. But if we have been forestalled,
That man lives not, or Calchas is no prophet.

LEADER (*calling*)

Woful Tecmessa, woman born to sorrow,
Come forth and hear this man who tells of a peril
That grazes us too close for our mind's ease.

(TECMESSA *enters from the tent.*)

TECMESSA

Why alas do you break my rest again
After brief respite from relentless woes?

LEADER

Give hearing to this messenger, who brings
Tidings that grieve me of how Ajax fares.

TECMESSA

Ah me, what sayest thou, man? Are we undone?

MESSENGER

I know not of *thy* fortune; but for Ajax,
If he be gone abroad, my mind misgives.

TECMESSA

Yes, he is gone. I am racked to know thy meaning.

MESSENGER

Teucer commands you to keep him within doors,
And not to let him leave his tent alone.

TECMESSA

And where is Teucer, and why speaks he thus?

MESSENGER

He has but now returned, and he forebodes
That this going-forth will prove fatal to Ajax.

TECMESSA

Woe's me, alas! From whom has he learned this?

MESSENGER

From the seer, Thestor's son, this very day,
Which is fraught either with his death or life.

TECMESSA

Ah me, my friends, avert this threatening doom!
Speed some of you to hasten Teucer hither:
Others go search the bays, some west, some east,
And track my lord's ill-omened going-forth.
Yes, now I know I have been deceived by him,
And from his former favour quite cast out.
Alas, child, what shall I do? Sit still I must not:
But far as I have strength I too will go.
Let us start quickly: 'tis no time for loitering,
If we would save one who is in haste to die.

LEADER

I am ready, as not words alone shall prove,
But speed of act and foot to make words good.

(*The* CHORUS, TECMESSA *and* MESSENGER *go out. The scene changes to a lonely place by the sea-shore. Bushes and underbrush are in the background.* AJAX *enters alone.*)

AJAX

The slayer stands so that his edge may cleave
Most surely (if there be leisure for such thought),
Being the gift of Hector, of all friends
Most unloved, and most hateful to my sight.
Then it is planted in Troy's hostile soil,
New-sharpened on the iron-biting whet.
And heedfully have I planted it, that so
With a swift death it prove to me most kind.
Thus have I made all ready. Next be thou
The first, O Zeus, to aid me, as is right.
It is no mighty boon that I shall crave.
Send some announcer of the evil news
To Teucer, that he first may lift me up,
When I have fallen upon this reeking sword,
Lest ere he come some enemy should espy me
And cast me forth to dogs and birds a prey.
This, O Zeus, I entreat thee, and likewise call
On Hermes, guide to the underworld, to lay me
Asleep without a struggle, at one swift bound,
When I have thrust my heart through with this sword.
Next I call on those maidens ever-living
And ever watchful of all human miseries,
The dread swift-striding Erinyes, that they mark
How by the Atreidae I have been destroyed:
And these vile men by a vile doom utterly
May they cut off, even as they see me here.
Come, O ye swift avenging Erinyes,
Spare not, touch with affliction the whole host.
And thou, whose chariot mounts up the steep sky,
Thou Sun, when on the land where I was born
Thou shalt look down, check thy gold-spangled rein,
And announce my disasters and my doom
To my aged sire and her who nurtured me.
She, woful woman, when she hears these tidings
Will wail out a loud dirge through all the town.
But I waste labour with this idle moan.
The act must now be done, and that with speed.
O Death, Death, come now and look upon me.—
No, 'tis there I shall meet and speak to thee.
But thee, bright daylight which I now behold,
And Helios in his chariot I accost
For this last time of all, and then no more.

O sunlight! O thou hallowed soil, my own
Salamis, stablished seat of my sire's hearth,
And famous Athens, with thy kindred race,
And you, ye springs and streams, and Trojan plains,
Farewell, all ye who have sustained my life.
This is the last word Ajax speaks to you.
All else in Hades to the dead will I say.
(*He falls on his sword. His body lies partially concealed by the underbrush.* SEMI-CHORUS 1 *enters.*)

SEMI-CHORUS 1 (*chanting*)
'Tis toil on toil, and toil again.
Where! where!
Where have not my footsteps been?
And still no place reveals the secret of my search.
But hark!
There again I hear a sound.
(SEMI-CHORUS 2 *enters.*)

SEMI-CHORUS 2 (*chanting*)
'Tis we, the ship-companions of your voyage.

SEMI-CHORUS 1 (*chanting*)
Well how now?

SEMI-CHORUS 2 (*chanting*)
We have searched the whole coast westward from the ship.

SEMI-CHORUS 1 (*chanting*)
You have found nought?

SEMI-CHORUS 2 (*chanting*)
A deal of toil, but nothing more to see.

SEMI-CHORUS 1 (*chanting*)
Neither has he been found along the path
That leads from the eastern glances of the sun.

CHORUS (*singing*)
strophe
From whom, oh from whom? what hard son of the waves,
Plying his weary task without thought of sleep,
Or what Olympian nymph of hill or stream that flows
Down to the Bosporus' shore,
Might I have tidings of my lord
Wandering somewhere seen

Fierce of mood? Grievous it is
When I have toiled so long, and ranged far and wide
Thus to fail, thus to have sought in vain.
Still the afflicted hero nowhere may I find.

(TECMESSA *enters and discovers the body.*)

TECMESSA

Alas, woe, woe!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Whose cry was it that broke from yonder copse?

TECMESSA

Alas, woe is me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It is the hapless spear-won bride I see,
Tecmessa, steeped in that wail's agony.

TECMESSA

I am lost, destroyed, made desolate, my friends.

LEADER

What is it? Speak.

TECMESSA

Ajax, our master, newly slaughtered lies
Yonder, a hidden sword sheathed in his body.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe for my lost hopes of home!
Woe's me, thou hast slain me, my king,
Me thy shipmate, hapless man!
Woful-souled woman too!

TECMESSA

Since thus it is with him, 'tis mine to wail.

LEADER

By whose hand has he wrought this luckless deed?

TECMESSA

By his own hand, 'tis evident. This sword
Whereon he fell, planted in earth, convicts him.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe for my blind folly! Lone in thy blood thou liest, from friends' help afar.
And I the wholly witless, the all unwary,
Forbore to watch thee. Where, where
Lieth the fatally named, intractable Ajax?

TECMESSA

None must behold him. I will shroud him wholly
In this enfolding mantle; for no man
Who loved him could endure to see him thus
Through nostrils and through red gash spouting up
The darkened blood from his self-stricken wound.
Ah me, what shall I do? What friend shall lift thee?
Where is Teucer? Timely indeed would he now come,
To compose duly his slain brother's corpse.
O hapless Ajax, who wast once so great,
Now even thy foes might dare to mourn thy fall.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

antistrophe

'Twas fate's will, alas, 'twas fate then for thou
Stubborn of soul at length to work out a dark
Doom of ineffable miseries. Such the dire
Fury of passionate hate
I heard thee utter fierce of mood
Railing at Atreus' sons
Night by night, day by day.
Verily then it was the sequence of woes
First began, when as the prize of worth
Fatally was proclaimed the golden panoply.

TECMESSA

Alas, woe, woe!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

A loyal grief pierces thy heart, I know.

TECMESSA

Alas, woe, woe!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woman, I marvel not that thou shouldst wail
And wail again, reft of a friend so dear.

TECMESSA

'Tis thine to surmise, mine to feel, too surely.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

'Tis even so.

TECMESSA

Ah, my child, to what bondage are we come,
Seeing what cruel taskmasters will be ours.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah me, at what dost thou hint?
What ruthless, unspeakable wrong
From the Atreidae fearest thou?
But may heaven avert that woe!

TECMESSA

Ne'er had it come to this save by heaven's will.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Yes, too great to be borne this heaven-sent burden.

TECMESSA

Yet such the woe which the dread child of Zeus,
Pallas, has gendered for Odysseus' sake.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Doubtless the much-enduring hero in his dark spy's soul exults mockingly,
And laughs with mighty laughter at these agonies
Of a frenzied spirit. Shame! Shame!
Sharers in glee at the tale are the royal Atreidae.

TECMESSA

Well, let them mock and glory in his ruin.
Perchance, though while he lived they wished not for him,
They yet shall wail him dead, when the spear fails them.
Men of ill judgment oft ignore the good
That lies within their hands, till they have lost it.
More to their grief he died than to their joy,
And to his own content. All his desire
He now has won, that death for which he longed.
Why then should they deride him? 'Tis the gods
Must answer for his death, not these men, no.
Then let Odysseus mock him with empty taunts.
Ajax is no more with them; but has gone,
Leaving to me despair and lamentation.

TEUCER (*from without*)
Alas, woe, woe!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
Keep silence! Is it Teucer's voice I hear
Lifting a dirge over this tragic sight?
(TEUCER *enters.*)

TEUCER
O brother Ajax, to mine eyes most dear,
Can it be thou hast fared as rumour tells?

LEADER
Yes, he is dead, Teucer: of that be sure.

TEUCER
Alas, how then can I endure my fate!

LEADER
Since thus it is . . .

TEUCER
O wretched, wretched me!

LEADER
Thou hast cause to moan.

TEUCER
O swift and cruel woe!

LEADER
Too cruel, Teucer!

TEUCER
Woe is me! But say—
His child—where shall I find him? Tell me where.

LEADER
Alone within the tent.

TEUCER (*to* TECMESSA)
Then with all speed
Go, bring him thither, lest some foe should snatch him
Like a whelp from a lioness bereaved.
Away! See it done quickly! All men are wont
To insult over the dead, once they lie low.
(TECMESSA *departs.*)

LEADER

Yes, Teucer, while he lived, did he not charge thee
To guard his son from harm, as now thou dost?

TEUCER

O sight most grievous to me of all sights
That ever I have looked on with my eyes!
And hatefullest of all paths to my soul
This path that now has led me to thy side,
O dearest Ajax, when I heard thy fate,
While seeking thee I tracked thy footsteps out.
For a swift rumour, as from some god, ran
Through the Greek host that thou wast dead and gone.
While yet far off I heard it, and groaned deep
In anguish; now I see, and my life dies.
Ay me!
Uncover. Let me behold woe's very worst.
(*The cover is lifted from the body.*)
O ghastly sight! victim of ruthless courage!
What miseries hast thou dying sown for me!
Whither, among what people, shall I go,
Who in thy troubles failed to give thee succour?
Oh doubtless Telamon, thy sire and mine,
With kind and gracious face is like to greet me,
Returned without thee: how else?—he who is wont
Even at good news to smile none the sweeter.
What will he keep back? What taunt not hurl forth
Against the bastard of a spear-won slave,
Him who through craven cowardice betrayed
Thee, beloved Ajax—or by guile, that so
I might inherit thy kingdom and thy house.
So will he speak, a passionate man, grown peevish
In old age, quick to wrath without a cause.
Then shall I be cast off, a banished man,
Proclaimed no more a freeman but a slave.
Such is the home that waits me; while at Troy
My foes are many, my well-wishers few.
All this will be my portion through thy death.
Ah me, what shall I do? How draw thee, brother,
From this fell sword, on whose bright murderous point
Thou hast breathed out thy soul? See how at last
Hector, though dead, was fated to destroy thee!
Consider, I pray, the doom of these two men.

Hector, with that same girdle Ajax gave him
Was lashed fast to Achilles' chariot rail
And mangled till he had gasped forth his life.
And 'twas from him that Ajax had this gift,
The blade by which he perished and lies dead.
Was it not some Erinys forged this sword,
And Hades the grim craftsman wrought that girdle?
I at least would maintain that the gods plan
These things and all things ever for mankind.
But whosoever's judgment likes not this,
Let him uphold his doctrine as I mine.

LEADER

Speak no more, but take counsel how to inter
Our dear lord, and what now it were best to say:
For 'tis a foe I see. Perchance he comes
To mock our misery, villain that he is.

TEUCER

What chieftain of the host do you behold?

LEADER

Menelaus, for whose sake we voyaged hither.

TEUCER

'Tis he. I know him well, now he is near.

(MENELAUS *enters with his retinue.*)

MENELAUS

You, Sir, I warn you, raise not yonder corpse
For burial, but leave it as it lies.

TEUCER

For what cause do you waste such swelling words?

MENELAUS

'Tis *my* will, and *his* will who rules the host.

TEUCER

Let us know then what pretext you allege.

MENELAUS

We hoped that we had brought this man from home
To be a friend and champion for the Greeks:
But a worse than Phrygian foe on trial we found him.
Devising death for the whole host, by night

He sallied forth against us, armed for slaughter.
And had not some god baffled this exploit,
Ours would have been the lot which now is his:
While we lay slain by a most shameful doom,
He would have still been living. But his outrage,
Foiled by a god, has fallen on sheep and herds.
Wherefore there lives no man so powerful
That he shall lay this corpse beneath a tomb;
But cast forth somewhere upon the yellow sands
It shall become food for the sea-shore birds.
Then lift not up your voice in threatening fury.
If while he lived we could not master him,
Yet in death will we rule him, in your despite,
Guiding him with our hands, since in his life
At no time would he hearken to my words.
Yet 'tis a sign of wickedness, when a subject
Deigns not to obey those placed in power above him.
For never can the laws be prosperously
Stablished in cities where awe is not found;
Nor may a camp be providently ruled
Without the shield of dread and reverence.
Yea, though a man be grown to mighty bulk,
Let him look lest some slight mischance o'erthrow him.
He with whom awe and reverence abide,
Doubt not, will flourish in security.
But where outrage and licence are not checked,
Be sure that state, though sped by prosperous winds,
Some day at last will founder in deep seas.
Yes, fear should be established in due season.
Dream not that we can act as we desire,
Yet avoid payment of the price in pain.
Well, fortune goes by turns. This man was fiery
And insolent once: 'tis mine now to exult.
I charge thee, bury him not, lest by that act
Thou thyself shouldst be digging thine own grave.

LEADER

Menelaus, do not first lay down wise precepts,
Then thyself offer outrage to the dead.

TEUCER (*to the* CHORUS)

Never, friends, shall I marvel any more,
If one of low birth acts injuriously,

When they who are accounted nobly born
Can utter such injurious calumnies.

(*To* MENELAUS)

Come, once more speak. You say you *brought* him hither?
Took him to be a champion of the Greeks?
Did he not sail as his own master, freely?
How are *you* his chieftain? How have *you* the right
To lord it o'er the folk he brought from home?
As Sparta's lord you came, not as *our* master.
In no way was it your prerogative
To rule him, any more than he could you.
As vassal of others you sailed hither, not
As captain of us all, still less of Ajax.
Go, rule those whom you *may* rule: chastise *them*
With proud words. But this man, though you forbid me,
Aye, and your fellow-captain, by just right
Will I lay in his grave, scorning your threats.
It was not for the sake of your lost wife
He came to Troy, like your toil-broken serfs,
But for the sake of oaths that he had sworn,
Not for yours. What cared *he* for nobodies?
Then come again and bring more heralds hither,
And the captain of the host. For such as you
I would not turn my head, for all your bluster.

LEADER

Such speech I like not, either, in peril's midst:
For harsh words rankle, be they ne'er so just.

MENELAUS

This bowman, it seems, has pride enough to spare.

TEUCER

Yes, 'tis no mean craft I have made my own.

MENELAUS

How big would be your boasts, had you a shield!

TEUCER

Shieldless, I would outmatch you panoplied.

MENELAUS

How terrible a courage dwells within your tongue!

TEUCER
He may be bold of heart whose side right favours.

MENELAUS
Is it right that my assassin should be honoured?

TEUCER
Assassin? How strange, if, though slain, you live!

MENELAUS
Heaven saved me: I was slain in his intent.

TEUCER
Do not dishonour then the gods who saved you.

MENELAUS
What, I rebel against the laws of heaven?

TEUCER
Yes, if you come to rob the dead of burial.

MENELAUS
My own foes! How could I endure such wrong?

TEUCER
Did Ajax ever confront you as your foe?

MENELAUS
He loathed me, and I him, as well you know.

TEUCER
Because to defraud him you intrigued for votes.

MENELAUS
It was the judges cast him, and not I.

TEUCER
Much secret villainy you could make seem fair.

MENELAUS
That saying will bring someone into trouble.

TEUCER
Not greater trouble than we mean to inflict.

MENELAUS
My one last word: this man must not have burial.

TEUCER.
Then hear my answer: burial he shall have.

MENELAUS
Once did I see a fellow bold of tongue,
Who had urged a crew to sail in time of storm;
Yet no voice had you found in him, when winds
Began to blow; but hidden beneath his cloak
The mariners might trample on him at will.
And so with you and your fierce railleries,
Perchance a great storm, though from a little cloud
Its breath proceed, shall quench your blatant outcry.

TEUCER.
And I once saw a fellow filled with folly,
Who gloried scornfully in his neighbour's woes.
So it came to pass that someone like myself,
And of like mood, beholding him spoke thus:
"Man, act not wickedly towards the dead;
Or, if thou dost, be sure that thou wilt rue it."
Thus did he monish that infatuate man.
And lo! yonder I see him; and as I think,
He is none else but thou. Do I speak riddles?

MENELAUS
I go. It were disgrace should any know
I had fallen to chiding where I might chastise.

TEUCER
Begone then. For to me 'twere worst disgrace
That I should listen to a fool's idle blustering.
(MENELAUS *and his retinue depart.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Soon mighty and fell will the strife be begun.
But speedily now, Teucer, I pray thee,
Seek some fit place for his hollow grave,
Which men's memories evermore shall praise,
As he lies there mouldering at rest.

(TECMESSA *enters with* EURYSACES.)

TEUCER
Look yonder, where the child and wife of Ajax
Are hastening hither in good time to tend
The funeral rites of his unhappy corpse.

My child, come hither. Stand near and lay thy hand
As a suppliant on thy father who begat thee.
And kneel imploringly with locks of hair
Held in thy hand—mine, and hers, and last thine—
The suppliant's treasure. But if any Greek
By violence should tear thee from this corpse,
For that crime from the land may he be cast
Unburied, and his whole race from the root
Cut off, even as I sever this lock.
There, take it, boy, and keep it. Let none seek
To move thee; but still kneel there and cling fast.
And you, like men, no women, by his side
Stand and defend him till I come again,
When I have dug his grave, though all forbid.

(TEUCER *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

When will this agony draw to a close?
When will it cease, the last of our years of exile?
Years that bring me labour accurst of hurtling spears,
Woe that hath no respite or end,
But wide-spread over the plains of Troy
Works sorrow and shame for Hellas' sons.

antistrophe 1

Would he had vanished away from the earth,
Rapt to the skies, or sunk to devouring Hades,
He who first revealed to the Greeks the use of arms
Leagued in fierce confederate war!
Ah, toils eternally breeding toils!
Yea, he was the fiend who wrought man's ruin.

strophe 2

The wretch accurst, what were his gifts?
Neither the glad, festival wreath,
Nor the divine, mirth-giving wine-cup;
No music of flutes, soothing and sweet:
Slumber by night, blissful and calm,
None he bequeathed us.
And love's joys, alas! love did he banish from me.
Here couching alone neglected,
With hair by unceasing dews drenched evermore, we curse
Thy shores, O cruel Ilium.

antistrophe 2

Erewhile against terror by night,
Javelin or sword, firm was our trust:
He was our shield, valiant Ajax.
But now a malign demon of fate
Claims him. Alas! When, when again
Shall joy befall me?
Oh once more to stand, where on the wooded headland
The ocean is breaking, under
The shadow of Sunium's height; thence could I greet from far
The divine city of Athens.

(TEUCER *enters, followed by* AGAMEMNON *and his retinue.*)

TEUCER

In haste I come; for the captain of the host,
Agamemnon, I have seen hurrying hither.
To a perverse tongue now will he give rein.

AGAMEMNON

Is it you, they tell me, have dared to stretch your lips
In savage raillery against us, unpunished?
'Tis you I mean, the captive woman's son.
Verily of well-born mother had you been bred,
Superb had been your boasts and high your strut,
Since you, being nought, have championed one who is nought,
Vowing that no authority is ours
By sea or land to rule the Greeks or you.
Are not these monstrous taunts to hear from slaves?
What was this man whose praise you vaunt so loudly?
Whither went he, or where stood he, where I was not?
Among the Greeks are there no men but he?
In evil hour, it seems, did we proclaim
The contest for Achilles' panoply,
If come what may Teucer is to call us knaves,
And if you never will consent, though worsted,
To accept the award that seemed just to most judges,
But either must keep pelting us with foul words,
Or stab us craftily in your rage at losing.
Where such discords are customary, never
Could any law be stablished and maintained,
If we should thrust the rightful winners by,
And bring the rearmost to the foremost place.
But such wrong must be checked. 'Tis not the big

Broad-shouldered men on whom we most rely;
No, 'tis the wise who are masters everywhere.
An ox, however large of rib, may yet
Be kept straight on the road by a little whip.
And this corrective, I perceive, will soon
Descend on you, unless you acquire some wisdom,
Who, though this man is dead, a mere shade now,
Can wag your insolent lips so freely and boldly.
Come to your senses: think what you are by birth.
Bring hither someone else, a man born free,
Who in your stead may plead your cause before us.
For when *you* speak, the sense escapes me quite:
I comprehend not your barbarian tongue.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Would that you both might learn wisdom and temperance.
There is no better counsel I can give you.

TEUCER

Alas! how soon gratitude to the dead
Proves treacherous and vanishes from men's minds,
If for thee, Ajax, this man has no more
The least word of remembrance, he for whom oft
Toiling in battle thou didst risk thy life.
But all that is forgotten and flung aside.
Thou who but now wast uttering so much folly,
Hast thou no memory left, how in that hour
When, pent within your lines, you were already
No more than men of nought, routed in battle,
He alone stood forth to save you, while the flames
Were blazing round the stern-decks of the ships
Already, and while Hector, leaping high
Across the trench, charged down upon the hulls?
Who checked this ruin? Was it not he, who nowhere
So much as stood beside thee, so thou sayest?
Would you deny he acted nobly there?
Or when again chosen by lot, unbidden,
Alone in single combat he met Hector?
For no runaway's lot did he cast in,
No lump of clammy earth, but such that first
It should leap lightly from the crested helm?
His were these exploits; and beside him stood
I, the slave, the barbarian mother's son.

Wretch, with what face can you fling forth such taunts?
Know you not that of old your father's father
Was Pelops, a barbarian, and a Phrygian?
That your sire Atreus set before his brother
A feast most impious of his own children's flesh?
And from a Cretan mother you were born,[4]
Whom when her father found her with a paramour,
He doomed her for dumb fishes to devour.
Being such, do you reproach *me* with my lineage?
Telamon is the father who begat me,
Who, as the foremost champion of the Greeks,
Won as his bride my mother, a princess
By birth, Laomedon's daughter: a chosen spoil
She had been given him by Alcmena's son.
Thus of two noble parents nobly born,
How should I shame one of my blood, whom now,
Laid low by such calamity, you would thrust
Unburied forth, and feel no shame to say it?
But of this be sure: wheresoever you may cast him,
Us three also with him will you cast forth.
For it beseems me in his cause to die
In sight of all, rather than for the sake
Of your wife—or your brother's should I say?
Look then not to my interest, but your own.
For if you assail me, you shall soon wish rather
To have been a coward than too bold against *me*.

(ODYSSEUS *enters*.)

LEADER

In good time, King Odysseus, hast thou come,
If 'tis thy purpose not to embroil but reconcile.

ODYSSEUS

What is it, friends? Far off I heard high words
From the Atreidae over this hero's corpse.

AGAMEMNON

Royal Odysseus, but now from this man
We have been listening to most shameful taunts.

ODYSSEUS

How shameful? I could find excuse for one
Who, when reviled, retorts with bitter words.

AGAMEMNON

Yes, I repaid his vile deeds with reviling.

ODYSSEUS

What has he done thee whereby thou art wronged?

AGAMEMNON

He says he will not leave yon corpse unhonoured
By sepulture, but will bury it in my spite.

ODYSSEUS

May now a friend speak out the truth, yet still
As ever ply his oar in stroke with thine?

AGAMEMNON

Speak: I should be witless else; for thee
Of all the Greeks I count the greatest friend.

ODYSSEUS

Then listen. For the gods' sake venture not
Thus ruthlessly to cast forth this man unburied:
And in no wise let violence compel thee
To such deep hate that thou shouldst tread down justice.
Once for me too this man was my worst foe,
From that hour when I won Achilles' arms;
Yet, though he was such towards me, I would not so
Repay him with dishonour as to deny
That of all Greeks who came to Troy, no hero
So valiant save Achilles have I seen.
So it is not just thou shouldst dishonour him.
Not him wouldst thou be wronging, but the laws
Of heaven. It is not righteousness to outrage
A brave man dead, not even though thou hate him.

AGAMEMNON

Thou, Odysseus, champion *him* thus against *me?*

ODYSSEUS

Yes; but I hated him while hate was honourable.

AGAMEMNON

Shouldst thou not also trample on him when dead?

ODYSSEUS

Atreides, glory not in dishonouring triumphs.

AGAMEMNON
'Tis hard for a king to act with piety.

ODYSSEUS
Yet not hard to respect a friend's wise counsel.

AGAMEMNON
A good man should obey those who bear rule.

ODYSSEUS
Relent. 'Tis no defeat to yield to friends.

AGAMEMNON
Reflect who it is to whom thou dost this grace.

ODYSSEUS
This man was once my foe, yet was he noble.

AGAMEMNON
Can it be thou wilt reverence a dead foe?

ODYSSEUS
His worth with me far outweighs enmity.

AGAMEMNON
Unstable of impulse are such men as thou.

ODYSSEUS
Many are friends now and hereafter foes.

AGAMEMNON
Do you then praise such friends as worth the winning?

ODYSSEUS
I am not wont to praise a stubborn soul.

AGAMEMNON
Cowards you would have us show ourselves this day.

ODYSSEUS
Not so, but just men before all the Greeks.

AGAMEMNON
You bid me then permit these funeral rites?

ODYSSEUS
Even so: for I myself shall come to this.

AGAMEMNON
Alike in all things each works for himself.

ODYSSEUS
And for whom should I work, if not myself?

AGAMEMNON
Let it be known then as your doing, not mine.

ODYSSEUS
So be it. At least you will have acted nobly.

AGAMEMNON
Nay, but of this be certain, that to thee
Willingly would I grant a greater boon.
Yet he, in that world as in this, shall be
Most hateful to me. But act as you deem fit.
(AGAMEMNON *and his retinue go out.*)

LEADER
After such proof, Odysseus, a fool only
Could say that inborn wisdom was not thine.

ODYSSEUS
Let Teucer know that I shall be henceforth
His friend, no less than I was once his foe.
And I will join in burying this dead man,
And share in all due rites, omitting none
Which mortal men to noblest heroes owe.

TEUCER
Noble Odysseus, for thy words I praise thee
Without stint. Wholly hast thou belied my fears.
Thou, his worst foe among the Greeks, hast yet
Alone stood by him staunchly, nor thought fit
To glory and exult over the dead,
Like that chief crazed with arrogance, who came,
He and his brother, hoping to cast forth
The dead man shamefully without burial.
May therefore the supreme Olympian Father,
The remembering Fury and fulfilling Justice
Destroy these vile men vilely, even as they
Sought to cast forth this hero unjustly outraged.
But pardon me, thou son of old Laertes,
That I must scruple to allow thine aid

In these rites, lest I so displease the dead.
In all else share our toil; and wouldst thou bring
Any man from the host, we grudge thee not.
What else remains, I will provide. And know
That thou towards us hast acted generously.

ODYSSEUS

It was my wish. But if my help herein
Pleases you not, so be it, I depart.

(ODYSSEUS *goes out.*)

TEUCER

'Tis enough. Too long is the time we have wasted
In talk. Haste some with spades to the grave:
Speedily hollow it. Some set the cauldron
On high amid wreathing flames ready filled
For pious ablution.
Then a third band go, fetch forth from the tent
All the armour he once wore under his shield.
Thou too, child, lovingly lay thy hand
On thy father's corpse, and with all thy strength
Help me to lift him: for the dark blood-tide
Still upward is streaming warm through the arteries.
All then who openly now would appear
Friends to the dead, come, hasten forwards.
To our valiant lord this labour is due.
We have served none nobler among men.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Unto him who has seen may manifold knowledge
Come; but before he sees, no man
May divine what destiny awaits him.

NOTES FOR AJAX

For a general treatment of the various critical problems of the play, the readers may be referred to the introduction in R. C. Jebb's edition.

R. C. Trevelyan, in the original printing of his translation, points out that in his version he has so rendered all the choral passages that they can be used with music written for the original Greek text. It might also be noted that Trevelyan's form of the name *Aias* has in the present version been changed to Ajax throughout.

1. Ajax is alluding to the fact that his cry of lamentation, *aiai,* closely accords with the letters of his name, *Aias,* as it is spelled in the Greek.

2. These lines refer to the former war at Troy in which Heracles and Telamon, the father of Ajax, participated.

3. The incident is recorded in Book VII of the *Iliad,* lines 303 ff. where Hector exchanged his sword for Ajax's belt, "bright with purple."

4. Aerope, wife of Atreus and mother of Agamemnon, was the daughter of Catreus, King of Crete, according to the version of the legend which Sophocles is following here.

II
OEDIPUS THE KING

Characters in the Play

Oedipus, *King of Thebes*
Priest of Zeus
Creon, *brother of* Jocasta
Teiresias, *the blind prophet*
Jocasta
First Messenger, *a shepherd from Corinth*
A Shepherd, *formerly in the service of* Laius
Second Messenger, *from the house*
Chorus of Theban Elders

Mute Persons

A train of Suppliants (*old men, youths, and children*).
The children Antigone *and* Ismene, *daughters of*
Oedipus *and* Jocasta

INTRODUCTION

OEDIPUS THE KING, Sophocles' masterpiece, is based upon the same Theban saga which Aeschylus used in his *The Seven Against Thebes*. Its date is unknown, though in all probability it must have been written when the poet's powers were at their zenith. The events of the story antecedent to the opening of the play emerge as its action advances. We hear of the oracle which warned Laius, the father of Oedipus, that a son would be born to him who would slay him. We hear how the son was born, was exposed, but rescued and reared by Polybus and Merope, King and Queen of Corinth, whom the boy regarded as his parents. We learn that Oedipus, in ignorance, slew Laius, came to Thebes, solved the riddle of the Sphinx, was made king, and married the recently widowed queen, Jocasta, who actually was his own mother. Many years have passed since their marriage, and two sons and two daughters were born to them. But presently a great calamity fell upon Thebes, a plague which was virtually destroying the city. Sophocles begins his tragedy at this point in the story, as a group of subjects appeal to their great king, Oedipus, to help them in their desolation. The action of the play reveals how Oedipus gradually came to learn the horrible truth that he had actually killed his father and married his mother.

Purely from the structural or technical point of view, Sophocles' play is practically unrivalled in dramatic literature. With remarkable skill he allows Oedipus step by step to become acquainted with the facts of his past, at the same time exploiting to the full the possibilities for dramatic irony, since the audience always knows more of the truth than Oedipus at any given moment in the play. Furthermore, rarely does one find such perfect motivation for individual actions within the drama. Each move by each character emerges convincingly from what has happened immediately before. Such improbabilities as there may be fall outside the limits of the play itself, as Aristotle noted in his *Poetics*. Because *Oedipus the King* possessed so many formal and technical excellences, it is not strange that Aristotle used it more frequently than any other Greek tragedy to illustrate his various critical theories.

The principal characters are masterfully drawn. First there is Creon,

here certainly not the person he is in the *Antigone*, who serves as a balance, a kind of mean, to which in a sense the aberrations of Oedipus from the norm are referred. His reaction to Oedipus' hasty and ill-judged accusations early in the play is reserved, restrained and honest. In fact, one of the most notable passages in the tragedy is Creon's speech in which he states the reasons why he would never wish to become king. At the close of the play Creon deals kindly but firmly with the broken king, and his personality, more than anything else, mitigates the horror of the tragic conclusion.

Jocasta is presented as the loyal and loving wife of Oedipus, and yet Sophocles has been able to infuse into her attitude towards Oedipus just enough of a maternal element to make her a dramatically telling figure. It is she who stops the quarrel between Oedipus and Creon. It is she who endeavours to curb Oedipus' inherent hot temper. It is she who clings tenaciously to her belief that the words of oracles and seers are worthless. Relying on this belief, she tries to comfort Oedipus and convince him that the gods wisely govern human destiny and that no human power can reveal the gods' will to men. In her own right Jocasta is a tragic figure of no inconsiderable proportions.

The character of Oedipus naturally dominates the whole play. From it primarily Aristotle has derived his famous definition of the tragic hero (*Poetics*, XIII), "a man who is highly renowned and prosperous, but one who is not preëminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty." Much has been written on Oedipus' rashness and his temper. Critics have pointed to his erratic perceptions which are now keen, and now amazingly faulty, and to his intense power of concentration which enables him to see only one thing at a time, very often to his terrible detriment.[1] All these qualities and more which are readily discernible in the Sophoclean portrait make his Oedipus one of the great characterizations which have come out of antiquity.

Oedipus the King has sometimes been called a tragedy of Fate, in which the characters are caught in a web of circumstance, from which they feebly and vainly try to extricate themselves. This may be partially true, but certainly there is a greater significance to the play than this theory would lead us to suspect. Oedipus in some sense is presented as master of his own destiny, or else it is meaningless that at the end of the play he does not excuse himself by pleading that he did not know what he was doing, but rather accepts full responsibility as a moral agent for all his acts, whether done in ignorance or not. In this point seems to lie the high distinction of the play, and its universal appeal. Tragic poets before

[1] Cf. M. L. Barstow, "*Oedipus Rex:* A Typical Greek Tragedy," in *The Greek Genius and its Influence*, edited by Lane Cooper.

Sophocles had studied the phenomenon of evil-doing perpetuating itself, and had insisted that men were accountable for their deeds, but somehow in this play the poet seems to have seen more deeply into the essential nature of human experience, and has communicated his vision in a masterpiece of dramatic art.

OEDIPUS THE KING

(SCENE:—*Before the royal palace of Oedipus at Thebes. In front of the large central doors there is an altar; a smaller altar stands also near each of the two side-doors. Suppliants—old men, youths, and young children —are seated on the steps of the altars. They are dressed in white tunics and cloaks,—their hair bound with white fillets. On the altars they have laid down olive-branches wreathed with fillets of wool. The* PRIEST OF ZEUS, *a venerable man, is alone standing, facing the central doors of the palace. These are now thrown open. Followed by two attendants, who place themselves on either side of the doors,* OEDIPUS *enters, in the robes of a king. For a moment he gazes silently on the groups at the altars, and then speaks.*)

OEDIPUS

MY CHILDREN, latest-born to Cadmus who was of old, why are ye set before me thus with wreathed branches of suppliants, while the city reeks with incense, rings with prayers for health and cries of woe? I deemed it unmeet, my children, to hear these things at the mouth of others, and have come hither myself, I, Oedipus renowned of all.

Tell me, then, thou venerable man—since it is thy natural part to speak for these—in what mood are ye placed here, with what dread or what desire? Be sure that I would gladly give all aid; hard of heart were I, did I not pity such suppliants as these.

PRIEST OF ZEUS

Nay, Oedipus, ruler of my land, thou seest of what years we are who beset thy altars,—some, nestlings still too tender for far flights,—some, bowed with age, priests, as I of Zeus,—and these, the chosen youth; while the rest of the folk sit with wreathed branches in the market-places, and before the two shrines of Pallas, and where Ismenus gives answer by fire.

For the city, as thou thyself seest, is now too sorely vexed, and can no more lift her head from beneath the angry waves of death; a blight is on her in the fruitful blossoms of the land, in the herds among the pastures, in the barren pangs of women; and withal the flaming god, the malign

plague, hath swooped on us, and ravages the town; by whom the house of Cadmus is made waste, but dark Hades rich in groans and tears.

It is not as deeming thee ranked with gods that I and these children are suppliants at thy hearth, but as deeming thee first of men, both in life's common chances, and when mortals have to do with more than man: seeing that thou camest to the town of Cadmus, and didst quit us of the tax that we rendered to the hard songstress; and this, though thou knewest nothing from us that could avail thee, nor hadst been schooled; no, by a god's aid, 'tis said and believed, didst thou uplift our life.

And now, Oedipus, king glorious in all eyes, we beseech thee, all we suppliants, to find for us some succour, whether by the whisper of a god thou knowest it, or haply as in the power of man; for I see that, when men have been proved in deeds past, the issues of their counsels, too, most often have effect.

On, best of mortals, again uplift our State! On, guard thy fame,—since now this land calls thee saviour for thy former zeal; and never be it our memory of thy reign that we were first restored and afterward cast down: nay, lift up this State in such wise that it fall no more!

With good omen didst thou give us that past happiness; now also show thyself the same. For if thou art to rule this land, even as thou art now its lord, 'tis better to be lord of men than of a waste: since neither walled town nor ship is anything, if it is void and no men dwell with thee therein.

OEDIPUS

Oh my piteous children, known, well known to me are the desires wherewith ye have come: well wot I that ye suffer all; yet, sufferers as ye are, there is not one of you whose suffering is as mine. Your pain comes on each one of you for himself alone, and for no other; but my soul mourns at once for the city, and for myself, and for thee.

So that ye rouse me not, truly, as one sunk in sleep: no, be sure that I have wept full many tears, gone many ways in wanderings of thought. And the sole remedy which, well pondering, I could find, this I have put into act. I have sent the son of Menoeceus, Creon, mine own wife's brother, to the Pythian house of Phoebus, to learn by what deed or word I might deliver this town. And already, when the lapse of days is reckoned, it troubles me what he doth; for he tarries strangely, beyond the fitting space. But when he comes, then shall I be no true man if I do not all that the god shows.

PRIEST

Nay, in season hast thou spoken; at this moment these sign to me that Creon draws near.

OEDIPUS

O king Apollo, may he come to us in the brightness of saving fortune, even as his face is bright!

PRIEST

Nay, to all seeming, he brings comfort; else would he not be coming crowned thus thickly with berry-laden bay.

OEDIPUS

We shall know soon: he is at range to hear.—(*Enter* CREON) Prince, my kinsman, son of Menoeceus, what news hast thou brought us from the god?

CREON

Good news: I tell thee that even troubles hard to bear,—if haply they find the right issue,—will end in perfect peace.

OEDIPUS

But what is the oracle? So far, thy words make me neither bold nor yet afraid.

CREON

If thou wouldest hear while these are nigh, I am ready to speak; or else to go within.

OEDIPUS

Speak before all: the sorrow which I bear is for these more than for mine own life.

CREON

With thy leave, I will tell what I heard from the god. Phoebus our lord bids us plainly to drive out a defiling thing, which (he saith) hath been harboured in this land, and not to harbour it, so that it cannot be healed.

OEDIPUS

By what rite shall we cleanse us? What is the manner of the misfortune?

CREON

By banishing a man, or by bloodshed in quittance of bloodshed, since it is that blood which brings the tempest on our city.

OEDIPUS

And who is the man whose fate he thus reveals?

CREON

Laius, king, was lord of our land before thou wast pilot of this State.

OEDIPUS

I know it well—by hearsay, for I saw him never.

CREON

He was slain; and the god now bids us plainly to wreak vengeance on his murderers—whosoever they be.

OEDIPUS

And where are they upon the earth? Where shall the dim track of this old crime be found?

CREON

In this land,—said the god. What is sought for can be caught; only that which is not watched escapes.

OEDIPUS

And was it in the house, or in the field, or on strange soil that Laius met this bloody end?

CREON

'Twas on a visit to Delphi, as he said, that he had left our land; and he came home no more, after he had once set forth.

OEDIPUS

And was there none to tell? Was there no comrade of his journey who saw the deed, from whom tidings might have been gained, and used?

CREON

All perished, save one who fled in fear, and could tell for certain but one thing of all that he saw.

OEDIPUS

And what was that? One thing might show the clue to many, could we get but a small beginning for hope.

CREON

He said that robbers met and fell on them, not in one man's might, but with full many hands.

OEDIPUS

How, then, unless there was some trafficking in bribes from here, should the robber have dared thus far?

CREON

Such things were surmised; but, Laius once slain, amid our troubles no avenger arose.

OEDIPUS

But, when royalty had fallen thus, what trouble in your path can have hindered a full search?

CREON

The riddling Sphinx had made us let dark things go, and was inviting us to think of what lay at our doors.

OEDIPUS

Nay, I will start afresh, and once more make dark things plain. Right worthily hath Phoebus, and worthily hast thou, bestowed this care on the cause of the dead; and so, as is meet, ye shall find me too leagued with you in seeking vengeance for this land, and for the god besides. On behalf of no far-off friend, no, but in mine own cause, shall I dispel this taint. For whoever was the slayer of Laius might wish to take vengeance on me also with a hand as fierce. Therefore, in doing right to Laius, I serve myself.

Come, haste ye, my children, rise from the altar-steps, and lift these suppliant boughs; and let some other summon hither the folk of Cadmus, warned that I mean to leave nought untried; for our health (with the god's help) shall be made certain—or our ruin.

PRIEST

My children, let us rise; we came at first to seek what this man promises of himself. And may Phoebus, who sent these oracles, come to us therewith, our saviour and deliverer from the pest.

(*Exeunt* OEDIPUS *and* PRIEST. *Enter* CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O sweetly-speaking message of Zeus, in what spirit hast thou come from golden Pytho unto glorious Thebes? I am on the rack, terror shakes my soul, O thou Delian healer to whom wild cries rise, in holy fear of thee, what thing thou wilt work for me, perchance unknown before, perchance renewed with the revolving years: tell me, thou immortal Voice, born of Golden Hope!

antistrophe 1

First call I on thee, daughter of Zeus, divine Athena, and on thy sister, guardian of our land, Artemis, who sits on her throne of fame, above the circle of our Agora, and on Phoebus the far-darter: O shine forth on me, my three-fold help against death! If ever aforetime, in arrest of ruin hurrying on the city, ye drove a fiery pest beyond our borders, come now also!

strophe 2

Woe is me, countless are the sorrows that I bear; a plague is on all our host, and thought can find no weapon for defence. The fruits of the glorious earth grow not; by no birth of children do women surmount the pangs in which they shriek; and life on life mayest thou see sped, like bird on nimble wing, aye, swifter than resistless fire, to the shore of the western god.

antistrophe 2

By such deaths, past numbering, the city perishes: unpitied, her children lie on the ground, spreading pestilence, with none to mourn: and meanwhile young wives, and grey-haired mothers with them, uplift a wail at the steps of the altars, some here, some there, entreating for their weary woes. The prayer to the Healer rings clear, and, blent therewith, the voice of lamentation: for these things, golden daughter of Zeus, send us the bright face of comfort.

strophe 3

And grant that the fierce god of death, who now with no brazen shields, yet amid cries as of battle, wraps me in the flame of his onset, may turn his back in speedy flight from our land, borne by a fair wind to the great deep of Amphitrite, or to those waters in which none find haven, even to the Thracian wave; for if night leave aught undone, day follows to accomplish this. O thou who wieldest the powers of the fire-fraught lightning, O Zeus our father, slay him beneath thy thunderbolt!

antistrophe 3

Lycean King, fain were I that thy shafts also, from thy bent bow's string of woven gold, should go abroad in their might, our champions in the face of the foe; yea, and the flashing fires of Artemis wherewith she glances through the Lycian hills. And I call him whose locks are bound with gold, who is named with the name of this land, ruddy Bacchus to whom Bacchants cry, the comrade of the Maenads, to draw near with the blaze of his blithe torch, our ally against the god unhonoured among gods.

(OEDIPUS *enters during the closing strains of the choral song.*)

OEDIPUS

Thou prayest: and in answer to thy prayer,—if thou wilt give a loyal welcome to my words and minister to thine own disease,—thou mayest hope to find succour and relief from woes. These words will I speak publicly, as one who has been a stranger to this report, a stranger to the

deed; for I should not be far on the track, if I were tracing it alone, without a clue. But as it is,—since it was only after the time of the deed that I was numbered a Theban among Thebans,—to you, the Cadmeans all, I do thus proclaim.

Whosoever of you knows by whom Laius son of Labdacus was slain, I bid him to declare all to me. And if he is afraid, I tell him to remove the danger of the charge from his path by denouncing himself; for he shall suffer nothing else unlovely, but only leave the land, unhurt. Or if any one knows an alien, from another land, as the assassin, let him not keep silence; for I will pay his guerdon, and my thanks shall rest with him besides.

But if ye keep silence—if any one, through fear, shall seek to screen friend or self from my behest—hear ye what I then shall do. I charge you that no one of this land, whereof I hold the empire and the throne, give shelter or speak word unto that murderer, whosoever he be,—make him partner of his prayer or sacrifice, or serve him with the lustral rite; but that all ban him their homes, knowing that *this* is our defiling thing, as the oracle of the Pythian god hath newly shown me. I then am on this wise the ally of the god and of the slain. And I pray solemnly that the slayer, whoso he be, whether his hidden guilt is lonely or hath partners, evilly, as he is evil, may wear out his unblest life. And for myself I pray that if, with my privity, he should become an inmate of my house, I may suffer the same things which even now I called down upon others. And on you I lay it to make all these words good, for my sake, and for the sake of the god, and for our land's, thus blasted with barrenness by angry heaven.

For even if the matter had not been urged on us by a god, it was not meet that ye should leave the guilt thus unpurged, when one so noble, and he your king, had perished; rather were ye bound to search it out. And now, since 'tis I who hold the powers which once he held, who possess his bed and the wife who bare seed to him; and since, had his hope of issue not been frustrate, children born of one mother would have made ties betwixt him and me—but, as it was, fate swooped upon his head; by reason of these things will I uphold this cause, even as the cause of mine own sire, and will leave nought untried in seeking to find him whose hand shed that blood, for the honour of the son of Labdacus and of Polydorus and elder Cadmus and Agenor who was of old.

And for those who obey me not, I pray that the gods send them neither harvest of the earth nor fruit of the womb, but that they be wasted by their lot that now is, or by one yet more dire. But for all you, the loyal folk of Cadmus to whom these things seem good, may Justice, our ally, and all the gods be with you graciously for ever.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

As thou hast put me on my oath, on my oath, O king, I will speak. I am not the slayer, nor can I point to him who slew. As for the question, it was for Phoebus, who sent it, to tell us this thing—who can have wrought the deed.

OEDIPUS

Justly said; but no man on the earth can force the gods to what they will not.

LEADER

I would fain say what seems to me next best after this.

OEDIPUS

If there is yet a third course, spare not to show it.

LEADER

I know that our lord Teiresias is the seer most like to our lord Phoebus; from whom, O king, a searcher of these things might learn them most clearly.

OEDIPUS

Not even this have I left out of my cares. On the hint of Creon, I have twice sent a man to bring him; and this long while I marvel why he is not here.

LEADER

Indeed (his skill apart) the rumours are but faint and old.

OEDIPUS

What rumours are they? I look to every story.

LEADER

Certain wayfarers were said to have killed him.

OEDIPUS

I, too, have heard it, but none sees him who saw it.

LEADER

Nay, if he knows what fear is, he will not stay when he hears thy curses, so dire as they are.

OEDIPUS

When a man shrinks not from a deed, neither is he scared by a word.

LEADER

But there is one to convict him. For here they bring at last the godlike prophet, in whom alone of men doth live the truth.

(*Enter* TEIRESIAS, *led by a boy.*)

OEDIPUS

Teiresias, whose soul grasps all things, the lore that may be told and the unspeakable, the secrets of heaven and the low things of earth,—thou feelest, though thou canst not see, what a plague doth haunt our State,—from which, great prophet, we find in thee our protector and only saviour. Now, Phoebus—if indeed thou knowest it not from the messengers—sent answer to our question that the only riddance from this pest which could come was if we should learn aright the slayers of Laius, and slay them, or send them into exile from our land. Do thou, then, grudge neither voice of birds nor any other way of seer-lore that thou hast, but rescue thyself and the State, rescue me, rescue all that is defiled by the dead. For we are in thy hand; and man's noblest task is to help others by his best means and powers.

TEIRESIAS

Alas, how dreadful to have wisdom where it profits not the wise! Aye, I knew this well, but let it slip out of mind; else would I never have come here.

OEDIPUS

What now? How sad thou hast come in!

TEIRESIAS

Let me go home; most easily wilt thou bear thine own burden to the end, and I mine, if thou wilt consent.

OEDIPUS

Thy words are strange, nor kindly to this State which nurtured thee, when thou withholdest this response.

TEIRESIAS

Nay, I see that thou, on thy part, openest not thy lips in season: therefore I speak not, that neither may I have thy mishap.

OEDIPUS

For the love of the gods, turn not away, if thou hast knowledge: all we suppliants implore thee on our knees.

TEIRESIAS

Aye, for ye are all without knowledge; but never will I reveal my griefs—that I say not thine.

OEDIPUS

How sayest thou? Thou knowest the secret, and wilt not tell it, but art minded to betray us and to destroy the State?

TEIRESIAS

I will pain neither myself nor thee. Why vainly ask these things? Thou wilt not learn them from me.

OEDIPUS

What, basest of the base,—for thou wouldest anger a very stone,—wilt thou never speak out? Can nothing touch thee? Wilt thou never make an end?

TEIRESIAS

Thou blamest my temper, but seest not that to which thou thyself art wedded: no, thou findest fault with me.

OEDIPUS

And who would not be angry to hear the words with which thou now dost slight this city?

TEIRESIAS

The future will come of itself, though I shroud it in silence.

OEDIPUS

Then, seeing that it must come, thou on thy part shouldst tell me thereof.

TEIRESIAS

I will speak no further; rage, then, if thou wilt, with the fiercest wrath thy heart doth know.

OEDIPUS

Aye, verily, I will not spare—so wroth I am—to speak all my thought. Know that thou seemest to me e'en to have helped in plotting the deed, and to have done it, short of slaying with thy hands. Hadst thou eyesight, I would have said that the doing, also, of this thing was thine alone.

TEIRESIAS

In sooth?—I charge thee that thou abide by the decree of thine own mouth, and from this day speak neither to these nor to me: *thou* art the accursed defiler of this land.

OEDIPUS

So brazen with thy blustering taunt? And wherein dost thou trust to escape thy due?

TEIRESIAS

I have escaped: in my truth is my strength.

OEDIPUS

Who taught thee this? It was not, at least, thine art.

TEIRESIAS

Thou: for thou didst spur me into speech against my will.

OEDIPUS

What speech? Speak again that I may learn it better.

TEIRESIAS

Didst thou not take my sense before? Or art thou tempting me in talk?

OEDIPUS

No, I took it not so that I can call it known:—speak again.

TEIRESIAS

I say that thou art the slayer of the man whose slayer thou seekest.

OEDIPUS

Now thou shalt rue that thou hast twice said words so dire.

TEIRESIAS

Wouldst thou have me say more, that thou mayest be more wroth?

OEDIPUS

What thou wilt; it will be said in vain.

TEIRESIAS

I say that thou hast been living in unguessed shame with thy nearest kin, and seest not to what woe thou hast come.

OEDIPUS

Dost thou indeed think that thou shalt always speak thus without smarting?

TEIRESIAS

Yes, if there is any strength in truth.

OEDIPUS

Nay, there is,—for all save thee; for thee that strength is not, since thou art maimed in ear, and in wit, and in eye.

TEIRESIAS

Aye, and thou art a poor wretch to utter taunts which every man here will soon hurl at thee.

OEDIPUS

Night, endless night hath thee in her keeping, so that thou canst never hurt me, or any man who sees the sun.

TEIRESIAS

No, thy doom is not to fall by *me:* Apollo is enough, whose care it is to work that out.

OEDIPUS

Are these Creon's devices, or thine?

TEIRESIAS

Nay, Creon is no plague to thee; thou art thine own.

OEDIPUS

O wealth, and empire, and skill surpassing skill in life's keen rivalries, how great is the envy that cleaves to you, if for the sake, yea, of this power which the city hath put into my hands, a gift unsought, Creon the trusty, Creon mine old friend, hath crept on me by stealth, yearning to thrust me out of it, and hath suborned such a scheming juggler as this, a tricky quack, who hath eyes only for his gains, but in his art is blind!

Come, now, tell me, where hast thou proved thyself a seer? Why, when the Watcher was here who wove dark song, didst thou say nothing that could free this folk? Yet the riddle, at least, was not for the first comer to read; there was need of a seer's skill; and none such thou wast found to have either by help of birds, or as known from any god: no, I came, I, Oedipus the ignorant, and made her mute, when I had seized the answer by my wit, untaught of birds. And it is I whom thou art trying to oust, thinking to stand close to Creon's throne. Methinks thou and the plotter of these things will rue your zeal to purge the land. Nay, didst thou not seem to be an old man, thou shouldst have learned to thy cost how bold thou art.

LEADER

To our thinking, both this man's words and thine, Oedipus, have been said in anger. Not for such words is our need, but to seek how we shall best discharge the mandates of the god.

TEIRESIAS

King though thou art, the right of reply, at least, must be deemed the same for both; of that I too am lord. Not to thee do I live servant, but to Loxias; and so I shall not stand enrolled under Creon for my patron. And I tell thee—since thou hast taunted me even with blindness—that thou hast sight, yet seest not in what misery thou art, nor where thou dwellest, nor with whom. Dost thou know of what stock thou art? And thou hast

been an unwitting foe to thine own kin, in the shades, and on the earth above; and the double lash of thy mother's and thy father's curse shall one day drive thee from this land in dreadful haste, with darkness then on the eyes that now see true.

And what place shall not be harbour to thy shriek, what of all Cithaeron shall not ring with it soon, when thou hast learnt the meaning of the nuptials in which, within that house, thou didst find a fatal haven, after a voyage so fair? And a throng of other ills thou guessest not, which shall make thee level with thy true self and with thine own brood.

Therefore heap thy scorns on Creon and on my message: for no one among men shall ever be crushed more miserably than thou.

OEDIPUS

Are these taunts to be indeed borne from *him?*—Hence, ruin take thee! Hence, this instant! Back!—away!—avaunt thee from these doors!

TEIRESIAS

I had never come, not I, hadst thou not called me.

OEDIPUS

I knew not that thou wast about to speak folly, or it had been long ere I had sent for thee to my house.

TEIRESIAS

Such am I,—as thou thinkest, a fool; but for the parents who begat thee, sane.

OEDIPUS

What parents? Stay . . . and who of men is my sire?

TEIRESIAS

This day shall show thy birth and shall bring thy ruin.

OEDIPUS

What riddles, what dark words thou always speakest!

TEIRESIAS

Nay, art not thou most skilled to unravel dark speech?

OEDIPUS

Make that my reproach in which thou shalt find me great.

TEIRESIAS

Yet 'twas just that fortune that undid thee.

OEDIPUS

Nay, if I delivered this town, I care not.

TEIRESIAS

Then I will go: so do thou, boy, take me hence.

OEDIPUS

Aye, let him take thee: while here, thou art a hindrance, thou, a trouble: when thou hast vanished, thou wilt not vex me more.

TEIRESIAS

I will go when I have done mine errand, fearless of thy frown: for thou canst never destroy me. And I tell thee—the man of whom thou hast this long while been in quest, uttering threats, and proclaiming a search into the murder of Laius—that man is here,—in seeming, an alien sojourner, but anon he shall be found a native Theban, and shall not be glad of his fortune. A blind man, he who now hath sight, a beggar, who now is rich, he shall make his way to a strange land, feeling the ground before him with his staff. And he shall be found at once brother and father of the children with whom he consorts; son and husband of the woman who bore him; heir to his father's bed, shedder of his father's blood.

So go thou in and think on that; and if thou find that I have been at fault, say thenceforth that I have no wit in prophecy.

(TEIRESIAS *is led out by the boy.* OEDIPUS *enters the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Who is he of whom the divine voice from the Delphian rock hath spoken, as having wrought with red hands horrors that no tongue can tell?

It is time that he ply in flight a foot stronger than the feet of storm-swift steeds: for the son of Zeus is springing on him, all armed with fiery lightnings, and with him come the dread, unerring Fates.

antistrophe 1

Yea, newly given from snowy Parnassus, the message hath flashed forth to make all search for the unknown man. Into the wild wood's covert, among caves and rocks he is roaming, fierce as a bull, wretched and forlorn on his joyless path, still seeking to put from him the doom spoken at Earth's central shrine: but that doom ever lives, ever flits around him.

strophe 2

Dreadly, in sooth, dreadly doth the wise augur move me, who approve not, nor am able to deny. How to speak, I know not; I am fluttered with forebodings; neither in the present have I clear vision,

nor of the future. Never in past days, nor in these, have I heard how the house of Labdacus or the son of Polybus had, either against other, any grief that I could bring as proof in assailing the public fame of Oedipus, and seeking to avenge the line of Labdacus for the undiscovered murder.

antistrophe 2

Nay, Zeus indeed and Apollo are keen of thought, and know the things of earth; but that mortal seer wins knowledge above mine, of this there can be no sure test; though man may surpass man in lore. Yet, until I see the word made good, never will I assent when men blame Oedipus. Before all eyes, the winged maiden came against him of old, and he was seen to be wise; he bore the test, in welcome service to our State; never, therefore, by the verdict of my heart shall he be adjudged guilty of crime.

(*Enter* CREON)

CREON

Fellow-citizens, having learned that Oedipus the king lays dire charges against me, I am here, indignant. If, in the present troubles, he thinks that he has suffered from *me*, by word or deed, aught that tends to harm, in truth I crave not my full term of years, when I must bear such blame as this. The wrong of this rumour touches me not in one point alone, but has the largest scope, if I am to be called a traitor in the city, a traitor too by thee and by my friends.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, but this taunt came under stress, perchance, of anger, rather than from the purpose of the heart.

CREON

And the saying was uttered, that *my* counsels won the seer to utter his falsehoods?

LEADER

Such things were said—I know not with what meaning.

CREON

And was this charge laid against me with steady eyes and steady mind?

LEADER

I know not; I see not what my masters do: but here comes our lord forth from the house.

(*Enter* OEDIPUS)

OEDIPUS

Sirrah, how camest thou here? Hast thou a front so bold that thou hast come to my house, who art the proved assassin of its master,—the palpable robber of my crown? Come, tell me, in the name of the gods, was it cowardice or folly that thou sawest in me, that thou didst plot to do this thing? Didst thou think that I would not note this deed of thine creeping on me by stealth, or, aware, would not ward it off? Now is not thine attempt foolish,—to seek, without followers or friends, a throne,—a prize which followers and wealth must win?

CREON

Mark me now,—in answer to thy words, hear a fair reply, and then judge for thyself on knowledge.

OEDIPUS

Thou art apt in speech, but I have a poor wit for thy lessons, since I have found thee my malignant foe.

CREON

Now first hear how I will explain this very thing—

OEDIPUS

Explain me not one thing—that thou art not false.

CREON

If thou deemest that stubbornness without sense is a good gift, thou art not wise.

OEDIPUS

If thou deemest that thou canst wrong a kinsman and escape the penalty, thou art not sane.

CREON

Justly said, I grant thee: but tell me what is the wrong that thou sayest thou hast suffered from me.

OEDIPUS

Didst thou advise, or didst thou not, that I should send for that reverend seer?

CREON

And now I am still of the same mind.

OEDIPUS

How long is it, then, since Laius—

CREON

Since Laius . . . ? I take not thy drift . . .

OEDIPUS

—was swept from men's sight by a deadly violence?

CREON

The count of years would run far into the past.

OEDIPUS

Was this seer, then, of the craft in those days?

CREON

Yea, skilled as now, and in equal honour.

OEDIPUS

Made he, then, any mention of me at that time?

CREON

Never, certainly, when I was within hearing.

OEDIPUS

But held ye not a search touching the murder?

CREON

Due search we held, of course—and learned nothing.

OEDIPUS

And how was it that this sage did not tell his story *then?*

CREON

I know not; where I lack light, 'tis my wont to be silent.

OEDIPUS

Thus much, at least, thou knowest, and couldst declare with light enough.

CREON

What is that? If I know it, I will not deny.

OEDIPUS

That, if he had not conferred with thee, he would never have named *my* slaying of Laius.

CREON

If so he speaks, thou best knowest; but I claim to learn from thee as much as thou hast now from me.

OEDIPUS

Learn thy fill: I shall never be found guilty of the blood.

CREON

Say, then—thou hast married my sister?

OEDIPUS

The question allows not of denial.

CREON

And thou rulest the land as she doth, with like sway?

OEDIPUS

She obtains from me all her desire.

CREON

And rank not I as a third peer of you twain?

OEDIPUS

Aye, 'tis just therein that thou art seen a false friend.

CREON

Not so, if thou wouldst reason with thine own heart as I with mine. And first weigh this,—whether thou thinkest that any one would choose to rule amid terrors rather than in unruffled peace,—granting that he is to have the same powers. Now I, for one, have no yearning in my nature to be a king rather than to do kingly deeds, no, nor hath any man who knows how to keep a sober mind. For now I win all boons from thee without fear; but, were I ruler myself, I should be doing much e'en against mine own pleasure.

How, then, could royalty be sweeter for me to have than painless rule and influence? Not yet am I so misguided as to desire other honours than those which profit. Now, all wish me joy; now, every man has a greeting for me; now, those who have a suit to thee crave speech with me, since therein is all their hope of success. Then why should I resign these things, and take those? No mind will become false, while it is wise. Nay, I am no lover of such policy, and, if another put it into deed, never could I bear to act with him.

And, in proof of this, first, go to Pytho, and ask if I brought thee true word of the oracle; then next, if thou find that I have planned aught in concert with the soothsayer, take and slay me, by the sentence not of one mouth, but of twain—by mine own, no less than thine. But make me not guilty in a corner, on unproved surmise. It is not right to adjudge bad men good at random, or good men bad. I count it a like thing for a man to cast off a true friend as to cast away the life in his own bosom, which

most he loves. Nay, thou wilt learn these things with sureness in time, for time alone shows a just man; but thou couldst discern a knave even in one day.

LEADER

Well hath he spoken, O king, for one who giveth heed not to fall: the quick in counsel are not sure.

OEDIPUS

When the stealthy plotter is moving on me in quick sort, I, too, must be quick with my counterplot. If I await him in repose, his ends will have been gained, and mine missed.

CREON

What wouldst thou, then? Cast me out of the land?

OEDIPUS

Not so: I desire thy death—not thy banishment—that thou mayest show forth what manner of thing is envy.

CREON

Thou speakest as resolved not to yield or to believe?

OEDIPUS

No; for thou persuadest me not that thou art worthy of belief.[1]

CREON

No, for I find thee not sane.

OEDIPUS

Sane, at least, in mine own interest.

CREON

Nay, thou shouldst be so in mine also.

OEDIPUS

Nay, thou art false.

CREON

But if thou understandest nought?

OEDIPUS

Yet must I rule.

CREON

Not if thou rule ill.

OEDIPUS

Hear him, O Thebes!

CREON

Thebes is for me also—not for thee alone.

(JOCASTA *enters from the palace.*)

LEADER

Cease, princes; and in good time for you I see Jocasta coming yonder from the house, with whose help ye should compose your present feud.

JOCASTA

Misguided men, why have ye raised such foolish strife of tongues? Are ye not ashamed, while the land is thus sick, to stir up troubles of your own? Come, go thou into the house,—and thou, Creon, to thy home,—and forbear to make much of a petty grief.

CREON

Kinswoman, Oedipus thy lord claims to do dread things unto me, even one or other of two ills,—to thrust me from the land of my fathers, or to slay me amain.

OEDIPUS

Yea; for I have caught him, lady, working evil, by ill arts, against my person.

CREON

Now may I see no good, but perish accursed, if I have done aught to thee of that wherewith thou chargest me!

JOCASTA

O, for the gods' love, believe it, Oedipus—first, for the awful sake of this oath unto the gods,—then for my sake and for theirs who stand before thee!

(*The following lines between the* CHORUS *and* OEDIPUS *and between the* CHORUS, JOCASTA, *and* OEDIPUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Consent, reflect, hearken, O my king, I pray thee!

OEDIPUS

What grace, then wouldest thou have me grant thee?

CHORUS

Respect him who aforetime was not foolish, and who now is strong in his oath.

OEDIPUS

Now dost thou know what thou cravest?

CHORUS

Yea.

OEDIPUS

Declare, then, what thou meanest.

CHORUS

That thou shouldest never use an unproved rumour to cast a dishonouring charge on the friend who has bound himself with a curse.

OEDIPUS

Then be very sure that, when thou seekest this, for me thou art seeking destruction, or exile from this land.

CHORUS

strophe 2

No, by him who stands in the front of all the heavenly host, no, by the Sun! Unblest, unfriended, may I die by the uttermost doom, if I have that thought! But my unhappy soul is worn by the withering of the land, and again by the thought that our old sorrows should be crowned by sorrows springing from you twain.

OEDIPUS

Then let him go, though I am surely doomed to death, or to be thrust dishonoured from the land. Thy lips, not his, move my compassion by their plaint; but he, where'er he be, shall be hated.

CREON

Sullen in yielding art thou seen, even as vehement in the excesses of thy wrath; but such natures are justly sorest for themselves to bear.

OEDIPUS

Then wilt thou not leave me in peace, and get thee gone?

CREON

I will go my way; I have found thee undiscerning, but in the sight of these I am just.

(*Exit* CREON.)

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Lady, why dost thou delay to take yon man into the house?

JOCASTA

I will do so, when I have learned what hath chanced.

CHORUS

Blind suspicion, bred of talk, arose; and, on the other part, injustice wounds.

JOCASTA

It was on both sides?

CHORUS

Aye.

JOCASTA

And what was the story?

CHORUS

Enough, methinks, enough—when our land is already vexed—that the matter should rest where it ceased.

OEDIPUS

Seest thou to what thou hast come, for all thy honest purpose, in seeking to slack and blunt my zeal?

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

King, I have said it not once alone—be sure that I should have been shown a madman, bankrupt in sane counsel, if I put thee away —thee, who gavest a true course to my beloved country when distraught by troubles—thee, who now also art like to prove our prospering guide.

JOCASTA

In the name of the gods, tell me also, O king, on what account thou hast conceived this steadfast wrath.

OEDIPUS

That will I; for I honour thee, lady, above yonder men:—the cause is Creon, and the plots that he hath laid against me.

JOCASTA

Speak on—if thou canst tell clearly how the feud began.

OEDIPUS

He says that I stand guilty of the blood of Laius.

JOCASTA

As on his own knowledge? Or on hearsay from another?

OEDIPUS

Nay, he hath made a rascal seer his mouthpiece; as for himself, he keeps his lips wholly pure.

JOCASTA

Then absolve thyself of the things whereof thou speakest; hearken to me, and learn for thy comfort that nought of mortal birth is a sharer in the science of the seer. I will give thee pithy proof of that.

An oracle came to Laius once—I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his ministers—that the doom should overtake him to die by the hand of his child, who should spring from him and me.

Now Laius,—as, at least, the rumour saith,—was murdered one day by foreign robbers at a place where three highways meet. And the child's birth was not three days past, when Laius pinned its ankles together, and had it thrown, by others' hands, on a trackless mountain.

So, in that case, Apollo brought it not to pass that the babe should become the slayer of his sire, or that Laius should die—the dread thing which he feared—by his child's hand. Thus did the messages of seer-craft map out the future. Regard them, thou, not at all. Whatsoever needful things the god seeks, he himself will easily bring to light.

OEDIPUS

What restlessness of soul, lady, what tumult of the mind hath just come upon me since I heard thee speak!

JOCASTA

What anxiety hath startled thee, that thou sayest this?

OEDIPUS

Methought I heard this from thee,—that Laius was slain where three highways meet.

JOCASTA

Yea, that was the story; nor hath it ceased yet.

OEDIPUS

And where is the place where this befell?

JOCASTA

The land is called Phocis; and branching roads lead to the same spot from Delphi and from Daulia.

OEDIPUS

And what is the time that hath passed since these things were?

JOCASTA

The news was published to the town shortly before thou wast first seen in power over this land.

OEDIPUS

O Zeus, what hast thou decreed to do unto me?

JOCASTA

And wherefore, Oedipus, doth this thing weigh upon thy soul?

OEDIPUS

Ask me not yet; but say what was the stature of Laius, and how ripe his manhood.

JOCASTA

He was tall,—the silver just lightly strewn among his hair; and his form was not greatly unlike to thine.

OEDIPUS

Unhappy that I am! Methinks I have been laying myself even now under a dread curse, and knew it not.

JOCASTA

How sayest thou? I tremble when I look on thee, my king.

OEDIPUS

Dread misgivings have I that the seer can see. But thou wilt show better if thou wilt tell me one thing more.

JOCASTA

Indeed—though I tremble—I will answer all thou askest, when I hear it.

OEDIPUS

Went he in small force, or with many armed followers, like a chieftain?

JOCASTA

Five they were in all,—a herald one of them; and there was one carriage, which bore Laius.

OEDIPUS

Alas! 'Tis now clear indeed.—Who was he who gave you these tidings, lady?

JOCASTA

A servant—the sole survivor who came home.

OEDIPUS

Is he haply at hand in the house now?

JOCASTA

No, truly; so soon as he came thence, and found thee reigning in the stead of Laius, he supplicated me, with hand laid on mine, that I would send him to the fields, to the pastures of the flocks, that he might be far from the sight of this town. And I sent him; he was worthy, for a slave, to win e'en a larger boon than that.

OEDIPUS

Would, then, that he could return to us without delay!

JOCASTA

It is easy: but wherefore dost thou enjoin this?

OEDIPUS

I fear, lady, that mine own lips have been unguarded; and therefore am I fain to behold him.

JOCASTA

Nay, he shall come. But I too, methinks, have a claim to learn what lies heavy on thy heart, my king.

OEDIPUS

Yea, and it shall not be kept from thee, now that my forebodings have advanced so far. Who, indeed, is more to me than thou, to whom I should speak in passing through such a fortune as this?

My father was Polybus of Corinth,—my mother, the Dorian Merope; and I was held the first of all the folk in that town, until a chance befell me, worthy, indeed, of wonder, though not worthy of mine own heat concerning it. At a banquet, a man full of wine cast it at me in his cups that I was not the true son of my sire. And I, vexed, restrained myself for that day as best I might; but on the next I went to my mother and father, and questioned them; and they were wroth for the taunt with him who had let that word fly. So on their part I had comfort; yet was this thing ever rankling in my heart; for it still crept abroad with strong rumour. And, unknown to mother or father, I went to Delphi; and Phoebus sent me forth disappointed of that knowledge for which I came, but in his response set forth other things, full of sorrow and terror and woe; even that I was fated to defile my mother's bed; and that I should show unto men a brood which they could not endure to behold; and that I should be the slayer of the sire who begat me.

And I, when I had listened to this, turned to flight from the land of Corinth, thenceforth wotting of its region by the stars alone, to some spot where I should never see fulfilment of the infamies foretold in mine evil doom. And on my way I came to the regions in which thou sayest that this prince perished. Now, lady, I will tell thee the truth. When in my journey I was near to those three roads, there met me a herald, and a man seated in a carriage drawn by colts, as thou hast described; and he who was in front, and the old man himself, were for thrusting me rudely from the path. Then, in anger, I struck him who pushed me aside—the driver; and the old man, seeing it, watched the moment when I was passing, and, from the carriage, brought his goad with two teeth down full upon my head. Yet was he paid with interest; by one swift blow from the staff in this hand he was rolled right out of the carriage, on his back; and I slew every man of them.

But if this stranger had any tie of kinship with Laius, who is now more wretched than the man before thee? What mortal could prove more hated of heaven? Whom no stranger, no citizen, is allowed to receive in his house; whom it is unlawful that any one accost; whom all must repel from their homes! And this—this curse—was laid on me by no mouth but mine own! And I pollute the bed of the slain man with the hands by which he perished. Say, am I vile? Oh, am I not utterly unclean?—seeing that I must be banished, and in banishment see not mine own people, nor set foot in mine own land, or else be joined in wedlock to my mother, and slay my sire, even Polybus, who begat and reared me.

Then would not he speak aright of Oedipus, who judged these things sent by some cruel power above man? Forbid, forbid, ye pure and awful gods, that I should see that day! No, may I be swept from among men, ere I behold myself visited with the brand of such a doom!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

To us, indeed, these things, O king, are fraught with fear; yet have hope, until at least thou hast gained full knowledge from him who saw the deed.

OEDIPUS

Hope, in truth, rests with me thus far alone; I can await the man summoned from the pastures.

JOCASTA

And when he has appeared—what wouldst thou have of him?

OEDIPUS

I will tell thee. If his story be found to tally with thine, I, at least, shall stand clear of disaster.

JOCASTA

And what of special note didst thou hear from me?

OEDIPUS

Thou wast saying that he spoke of Laius as slain by robbers. If, then, he still speaks, as before, of several, I was not the slayer: a solitary man could not be held the same with that band. But if he names one lonely wayfarer, then beyond doubt this guilt leans to me.

JOCASTA

Nay, be assured that thus, at least, the tale was first told; he cannot revoke that, for the city heard it, not I alone. But even if he should diverge somewhat from his former story, never, king, can he show that the murder of Laius, at least, is truly square to prophecy; of whom Loxias plainly said that he must die by the hand of my child. Howbeit that poor innocent never slew him, but perished first itself. So henceforth, for what touches divination, I would not look to my right hand or my left.

OEDIPUS

Thou judgest well. But nevertheless send some one to fetch the peasant, and neglect not this matter.

JOCASTA

I will send without delay. But let us come into the house: nothing will I do save at thy good pleasure.

(OEDIPUS *and* JOCASTA *go into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

May destiny still find me winning the praise of reverent purity in all words and deeds sanctioned by those laws of range sublime, called into life throughout the high clear heaven, whose father is Olympus alone; their parent was no race of mortal men, no, nor shall oblivion ever lay them to sleep; the god is mighty in them, and he grows not old.

antistrophe 1

Insolence breeds the tyrant; Insolence, once vainly surfeited on wealth that is not meet nor good for it, when it hath scaled the topmost ramparts, is hurled to a dire doom, wherein no service of the feet can serve. But I pray that the god never quell such rivalry as benefits the State; the god will I ever hold for our protector.

strophe 2

But if any man walks haughtily in deed or word, with no fear of Justice, no reverence for the images of gods, may an evil doom seize him for his ill-starred pride, if he will not win his vantage fairly, nor keep him from unholy deeds, but must lay profaning hands on sanctities.

Where such things are, what mortal shall boast any more than he can ward the arrows of the gods from his life? Nay, if such deeds are in honour, wherefore should we join in the sacred dance?

antistrophe 2

No more will I go reverently to earth's central and inviolate shrine, no more to Abae's temple or Olympia, if these oracles fit not the issue, so that all men shall point at them with the finger. Nay, king,—if thou art rightly called,—Zeus all-ruling, may it not escape thee and thine ever-deathless power!

The old prophecies concerning Laïus are fading; already men are setting them at nought, and nowhere is Apollo glorified with honours; the worship of the gods is perishing.

(JOCASTA *comes forth, bearing a branch, wreathed with festoons of wool, which, as a suppliant, she is about to lay on the altar of the household god, Lycean Apollo, in front of the palace.*)

JOCASTA

Princes of the land, the thought has come to me to visit the shrines of the gods, with this wreathed branch in my hands, and these gifts of incense. For Oedipus excites his soul overmuch with all manner of alarms, nor, like a man of sense, judges the new things by the old, but is at the will of the speaker, if he speak terrors.

Since, then, by counsel I can do no good, to thee, Lycean Apollo, for thou art nearest, I have come, a suppliant with these symbols of prayer, that thou mayest find us some riddance from uncleanness. For now we are all afraid, seeing *him* affrighted, even as they who see fear in the helmsman of their ship.

(*While* JOCASTA *is offering her prayers to the god, a* MESSENGER, *evidently a stranger, enters and addresses the Elders of the* CHORUS.)

MESSENGER

Might I learn from you, strangers, where is the house of the king Oedipus? Or, better still, tell me where he himself is—if ye know.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This is his dwelling, and he himself, stranger, is within; and this lady is the mother of his children.

MESSENGER

Then may she be ever happy in a happy home, since she is his heaven-blest queen.

JOCASTA

Happiness to thee also, stranger! 'tis the due of thy fair greeting.—But say what thou hast come to seek or to tell.

MESSENGER

Good tidings, lady, for thy house and for thy husband.

JOCASTA

What are they? And from whom hast thou come?

MESSENGER

From Corinth: and at the message which I will speak anon thou wilt rejoice—doubtless; yet haply grieve.

JOCASTA

And what is it? How hath it thus a double potency?

MESSENGER

The people will make him king of the Isthmian land, as 'twas said there.

JOCASTA

How then? Is the aged Polybus no more in power?

MESSENGER

No, verily: for death holds him in the tomb.

JOCASTA

How sayest thou? Is Polybus dead, old man?

MESSENGER

If I speak not the truth, I am content to die.

JOCASTA

O handmaid, away with all speed, and tell this to thy master! O ye oracles of the gods, where stand ye now! This is the man whom Oedipus long feared and shunned, lest he should slay him; and now this man hath died in the course of destiny, not by his hand.

(OEDIPUS *enters from the palace.*)

OEDIPUS

Jocasta, dearest wife, why hast thou summoned me forth from these doors?

JOCASTA

Hear this man, and judge, as thou listenest, to what the awful oracles of the gods have come.

OEDIPUS

And he—who may he be, and what news hath he for me?

JOCASTA

He is from Corinth, to tell that thy father Polybus lives no longer, but hath perished.

OEDIPUS

How, stranger? Let me have it from thine own mouth.

MESSENGER

If I must first make these tidings plain, know indeed that he is dead and gone.

OEDIPUS

By treachery, or by visit of disease?

MESSENGER

A light thing in the scale brings the aged to their rest.

OEDIPUS

Ah, he died, it seems, of sickness?

MESSENGER

Yea, and of the long years that he had told.

OEDIPUS

Alas, alas! Why, indeed, my wife, should one look to the hearth of the Pythian seer, or to the birds that scream above our heads, on whose showing I was doomed to slay my sire? But he is dead, and hid already beneath the earth; and here am I, who have not put hand to spear.—Unless, perchance, he was killed by longing for me: thus, indeed, I should be the cause of his death. But the oracles as they stand, at least, Polybus hath swept with him to his rest in Hades: they are worth nought.

JOCASTA

Nay, did I not so foretell to thee long since?

OEDIPUS

Thou didst: but I was misled by my fear.

JOCASTA

Now no more lay aught of those things to heart.

OEDIPUS

But surely I must needs fear my mother's bed?

JOCASTA

Nay, what should mortal fear, for whom the decrees of Fortune are supreme, and who hath clear foresight of nothing? 'Tis best to live at random, as one may. But fear not thou touching wedlock with thy mother. Many men ere now have so fared in dreams also: but he to whom these things are as nought bears his life most easily.

OEDIPUS

All these bold words of thine would have been well, were not my mother living; but as it is, since she lives, I must needs fear—though thou sayest well.

JOCASTA

Howbeit thy father's death is a great sign to cheer us.

OEDIPUS

Great, I know; but my fear is of her who lives.

MESSENGER

And who is the woman about whom ye fear?

OEDIPUS

Merope, old man, the consort of Polybus.

MESSENGER

And what is it in her that moves your fear?

OEDIPUS

A heaven-sent oracle of dread import, stranger.

MESSENGER

Lawful, or unlawful, for another to know?

OEDIPUS

Lawful, surely. Loxias once said that I was doomed to espouse mine own mother, and to shed with mine own hands my father's blood. Wherefore my home in Corinth was long kept by me afar; with happy event, indeed,—yet still 'tis sweet to see the face of parents.

MESSENGER

Was it indeed for fear of this that thou wast an exile from that city?

OEDIPUS

And because I wished not, old man, to be the slayer of my sire.

MESSENGER

Then why have I not freed thee, king, from this fear, seeing that I came with friendly purpose?

OEDIPUS

Indeed thou shouldst have guerdon due from me.

MESSENGER

Indeed 'twas chiefly for this that I came—that, on thy return home, I might reap some good.

OEDIPUS

Nay, I will never go near my parents.

MESSENGER

Ah my son, 'tis plain enough that thou knowest not what thou doest.

OEDIPUS

How, old man? For the gods' love, tell me.

MESSENGER

If for these reasons thou shrinkest from going home.

OEDIPUS

Aye, I dread lest Phoebus prove himself true for me.

MESSENGER

Thou dreadest to be stained with guilt through thy parents?

OEDIPUS

Even so, old man—this it is that ever affrights me.

MESSENGER

Dost thou know, then, that thy fears are wholly vain?

OEDIPUS

How so, if I was born of those parents?

MESSENGER

Because Polybus was nothing to thee in blood.

OEDIPUS

What sayest thou? Was Polybus not my sire?

MESSENGER

No more than he who speaks to thee, but just so much.

OEDIPUS

And how can my sire be level with him who is as nought to me?

MESSENGER

Nay, he begat thee not, any more than I.

OEDIPUS

Nay, wherefore, then, called he me his son?

MESSENGER

Know that he had received thee as a gift from my hands of yore.

OEDIPUS

And yet he loved me so dearly, who came from another's hand?

MESSENGER

Yea, his former childlessness won him thereto.

OEDIPUS

And thou—hadst thou bought me or found me by chance, when thou gavest me to him?

MESSENGER

Found thee in Cithaeron's winding glens.

OEDIPUS

And wherefore wast thou roaming in those regions?

MESSENGER

I was there in charge of mountain flocks.

OEDIPUS

What, thou wast a shepherd—a vagrant hireling?

MESSENGER

But thy preserver, my son, in that hour.

OEDIPUS

And what pain was mine when thou didst take me in thine arms?

MESSENGER

The ankles of thy feet might witness.

OEDIPUS

Ah me, why dost thou speak of that old trouble?

MESSENGER

I freed thee when thou hadst thine ankles pinned together.

OEDIPUS

Aye, 'twas a dread brand of shame that I took from my cradle.

MESSENGER

Such, that from that fortune thou wast called by the name which still is thine.

OEDIPUS

Oh, for the gods' love—was the deed my mother's or father's? Speak!

MESSENGER

I know not; he who gave thee to me wots better of that than I.

OEDIPUS

What, thou hadst me from another? Thou didst not light on me thyself?

MESSENGER

No: another shepherd gave thee up to me.

OEDIPUS

Who was he? Art thou in case to tell clearly?

MESSENGER

I think he was called one of the household of Laius.

OEDIPUS

The king who ruled this country long ago?

MESSENGER

The same: 'twas in his service that the man was a herd.

OEDIPUS

Is he still alive, that I might see him?

MESSENGER

Nay, ye folk of the country should know best.

OEDIPUS

Is there any of you here present that knows the herd of whom he speaks —that hath seen him in the pastures or the town? Answer! The hour hath come that these things should be finally revealed.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Methinks he speaks of no other than the peasant whom thou wast already fain to see; but our lady Jocasta might best tell that.

OEDIPUS

Lady, wottest thou of him whom we lately summoned? Is it of him that this man speaks?

JOCASTA

Why ask of whom he spoke? Regard it not . . . waste not a thought on what he said . . . 'twere idle.

OEDIPUS

It must not be that, with such clues in my grasp, I should fail to bring my birth to light.

JOCASTA

For the gods' sake, if thou hast any care for thine own life, forbear this search! My anguish is enough.

OEDIPUS

Be of good courage; though I be found the son of servile mother,—aye, a slave by three descents,—*thou* wilt not be proved base-born.

JOCASTA

Yet hear me, I implore thee: do not thus.

OEDIPUS

I must not hear of not discovering the whole truth.

JOCASTA

Yet I wish thee well—I counsel thee for the best.

OEDIPUS

These best counsels, then, vex my patience.

JOCASTA

Ill-fated one! Mayst thou never come to know who thou art!

OEDIPUS

Go, some one, fetch me the herdsman hither,—and leave yon woman to glory in her princely stock.

JOCASTA

Alas, alas, miserable!—that word alone can I say unto thee, and no other word henceforth for ever.

(*She rushes into the palace.*)

LEADER

Why hath the lady gone, Oedipus, in a transport of wild grief? I misdoubt, a storm of sorrow will break forth from this silence.

OEDIPUS

Break forth what will! Be my race never so lowly, I must crave to learn it. Yon woman, perchance,—for she is proud with more than a woman's pride—thinks shame of my base source. But I, who hold myself son of Fortune that gives good, will not be dishonoured. She is the mother from whom I spring; and the months, my kinsmen, have marked me sometimes lowly, sometimes great. Such being my lineage, never more can I prove false to it, or spare to search out the secret of my birth.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

If I am a seer or wise of heart, O Cithaeron, thou shalt not fail—by yon heaven, thou shalt not!—to know at tomorrow's full moon that Oedipus honours thee as native to him, as his nurse, and his mother, and that thou art celebrated in our dance and song, because thou art well-pleasing to our prince. O Phoebus to whom we cry, may these things find favour in thy sight!

antistrophe

Who was it, my son, who of the race whose years are many that bore thee in wedlock with Pan, the mountain-roaming father? Or was it a bride of Loxias that bore thee? For dear to him are all the upland pastures. Or perchance 'twas Cyllene's lord,[2] or the Bacchants' god, dweller on the hill-tops, that received thee, a new-born joy, from one of the Nymphs of Helicon, with whom he most doth sport.

OEDIPUS

Elders, if 'tis for me to guess, who have never met with him, I think I see the herdsman of whom we have long been in quest; for in his venerable age he tallies with yon stranger's years, and withal I know those who bring him, methinks, as servants of mine own. But perchance thou mayest have the advantage of me in knowledge, if thou hast seen the herdsman before.

LEADER

Aye, I know him, be sure; he was in the service of Laius—trusty as any man, in his shepherd's place.

(*The* HERDSMAN *is brought in.*)

OEDIPUS

I ask thee first, Corinthian stranger, is this he whom thou meanest?

MESSENGER

This man whom thou beholdest.

OEDIPUS

Ho thou, old man—I would have thee look this way, and answer all that I ask thee. Thou wast once in the service of Laius?

HERDSMAN

I was—a slave not bought, but reared in his house.

OEDIPUS

Employed in what labour, or what way of life?

HERDSMAN

For the best part of my life I tended flocks.

OEDIPUS

And what the regions that thou didst chiefly haunt?

HERDSMAN

Sometimes it was Cithaeron, sometimes the neighbouring ground.

OEDIPUS

Then wottest thou of having noted yon man in these parts—

HERDSMAN

Doing what? . . . What man dost thou mean? . . .

OEDIPUS

This man here—or of having ever met him before?

HERDSMAN

Not so that I could speak at once from memory.

MESSENGER

And no wonder, master. But I will bring clear recollection to his ignorance. I am sure that he well wots of the time when we abode in the region of Cithaeron,—he with two flocks, I, his comrade, with one,—three full half-years, from spring to Arcturus; and then for the winter I used to drive my flock to mine own fold, and he took his to the fold of Laius. Did aught of this happen as I tell, or did it not?

HERDSMAN

Thou speakest the truth—though 'tis long ago.

MESSENGER

Come, tell me now—wottest thou of having given me a boy in those days, to be reared as mine own foster-son?

HERDSMAN
What now? Why dost thou ask the question?

MESSENGER
Yonder man, my friend, is he who then was young.

HERDSMAN
Plague seize thee—be silent once for all!

OEDIPUS
Ha! chide him not, old man—thy words need chiding more than his.

HERDSMAN
And wherein, most noble master, do I offend?

OEDIPUS
In not telling of the boy concerning whom he asks.

HERDSMAN
He speaks without knowledge—he is busy to no purpose.

OEDIPUS
Thou wilt not speak with a good grace, but thou shalt on pain.

HERDSMAN
Nay, for the gods' love, misuse not an old man!

OEDIPUS
Ho, some one—pinion him this instant!

HERDSMAN
Alas, wherefore? what more wouldst thou learn?

OEDIPUS
Didst thou give this man the child of whom he asks?

HERDSMAN
I did,—and would I had perished that day!

OEDIPUS
Well, thou wilt come to that, unless thou tell the honest truth.

HERDSMAN
Nay, much more am I lost, if I speak.

OEDIPUS
The fellow is bent, methinks, on more delays . . .

HERDSMAN

No, no!—I said before that I gave it to him.

OEDIPUS

Whence hadst thou got it? In thine own house, or from another?

HERDSMAN

Mine own it was not—I had received it from a man.

OEDIPUS

From whom of the citizens here? from what home?

HERDSMAN

Forbear, for the gods' love, master, forbear to ask more!

OEDIPUS

Thou art lost if I have to question thee again.

HERDSMAN

It was a child, then, of the house of Laius.

OEDIPUS

A slave? or one born of his own race?

HERDSMAN

Ah me—I am on the dreaded brink of speech.

OEDIPUS

And I of hearing; yet must I hear.

HERDSMAN

Thou must know, then, that 'twas said to be his own child—but thy lady within could best say how these things are.

OEDIPUS

How? She gave it to thee?

HERDSMAN

Yea, O king.

OEDIPUS

For what end?

HERDSMAN

That I should make away with it.

OEDIPUS

Her own child, the wretch?

HERDSMAN

Aye, from fear of evil prophecies.

OEDIPUS

What were they?

HERDSMAN

The tale ran that he must slay his sire.

OEDIPUS

Why, then, didst thou give him up to this old man?

HERDSMAN

Through pity, master, as deeming that he would bear him away to another land, whence he himself came; but he saved him for the direst woe. For if thou art what this man saith, know that thou wast born to misery.

OEDIPUS

Oh, oh! All brought to pass—all true! Thou light, may I now look my last on thee—I who have been found accursed in birth, accursed in wedlock, accursed in the shedding of blood!

(*He rushes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Alas, ye generations of men, how mere a shadow do I count your life! Where, where is the mortal who wins more of happiness than just the seeming, and, after the semblance, a falling away? Thine is a fate that warns me,—thine, thine, unhappy Oedipus—to call no earthly creature blest.

antistrophe 1

For he, O Zeus, sped his shaft with peerless skill, and won the prize of an all-prosperous fortune; he slew the maiden with crooked talons who sang darkly; he arose for our land as a tower against death. And from that time, Oedipus, thou hast been called our king, and hast been honoured supremely, bearing sway in great Thebes.

strophe 2

But now whose story is more grievous in men's ears? Who is a more wretched captive to fierce plagues and troubles, with all his life reversed?

Alas, renowned Oedipus! The same bounteous place of rest sufficed thee, as child and as sire also, that thou shouldst make thereon thy nuptial couch. Oh, how can the soil wherein thy father sowed, unhappy one, have suffered thee in silence so long?

antistrophe 2

Time the all-seeing hath found thee out in thy despite: he judgeth the monstrous marriage wherein begetter and begotten have long been one.

Alas, thou child of Laius, would, would that I had never seen thee! I wail as one who pours a dirge from his lips; sooth to speak, 'twas thou that gavest me new life, and through thee darkness hath fallen upon mine eyes.

(*Enter* SECOND MESSENGER *from the palace.*)

SECOND MESSENGER

Ye who are ever most honoured in this land, what deeds shall ye hear, what deeds behold, what burden of sorrow shall be yours, if, true to your race, ye still care for the house of Labdacus! For I ween that not Ister nor Phasis could wash this house clean, so many are the ills that it shrouds, or will soon bring to light,—ills wrought not unwittingly, but of purpose. And those griefs smart most which are seen to be of our own choice.

LEADER

Indeed those which we knew before fall not short of claiming sore lamentation: besides them, what dost thou announce?

SECOND MESSENGER

This is the shortest tale to tell and to hear: our royal lady Jocasta is dead.

LEADER

Alas, hapless one! From what cause?

SECOND MESSENGER

By her own hand. The worst pain in what hath chanced is not for you, for yours it is not to behold. Nevertheless, so far as mine own memory serves, ye shall learn that unhappy woman's fate.

When, frantic, she had passed within the vestibule, she rushed straight towards her nuptial couch, clutching her hair with the fingers of both hands; once within the chamber, she dashed the doors together at her back; then called on the name of Laïus, long since a corpse, mindful of that son, begotten long ago, by whom the sire was slain, leaving the mother to breed accursed offspring with his own.

And she bewailed the wedlock wherein, wretched, she had borne a two-fold brood, husband by husband, children by her child. And how thereafter she perished, is more than I know. For with a shriek Oedipus burst in, and suffered us not to watch her woe unto the end; on him, as he rushed around, our eyes were set. To and fro he went, asking us to give him a sword,—asking where he should find the wife who was no wife, but

a mother whose womb had borne alike himself and his children. And, in his frenzy, a power above man was his guide; for 'twas none of us mortals who were nigh. And with a dread shriek, as though some one beckoned him on, he sprang at the double doors, and from their sockets forced the bending bolts, and rushed into the room.

There beheld we the woman hanging by the neck in a twisted noose of swinging cords. But he, when he saw her, with a dread, deep cry of misery, loosed the halter whereby she hung. And when the hapless woman was stretched upon the ground, then was the sequel dread to see. For he tore from her raiment the golden brooches wherewith she was decked, and lifted them, and smote full on his own eye-balls, uttering words like these: 'No more shall ye behold such horrors as I was suffering and working! long enough have ye looked on those whom ye ought never to have seen, failed in knowledge of those whom I yearned to know—henceforth ye shall be dark!'

To such dire refrain, not once alone but oft struck he his eyes with lifted hand; and at each blow the ensanguined eye-balls bedewed his beard, nor sent forth sluggish drops of gore, but all at once a dark shower of blood came down like hail.

From the deeds of twain such ills have broken forth, not on one alone, but with mingled woe for man and wife. The old happiness of their ancestral fortune was aforetime happiness indeed; but to-day—lamentation, ruin, death, shame, all earthly ills that can be named—all, all are theirs.

LEADER

And hath the sufferer now any respite from pain?

SECOND MESSENGER

He cries for some one to unbar the gates and show to all the Cadmeans his father's slayer, his mother's—the unholy word must not pass my lips, —as purposing to cast himself out of the land, and abide no more, to make the house accursed under his own curse. Howbeit he lacks strength, and one to guide his steps; for the anguish is more than man may bear. And he will show this to thee also; for lo, the bars of the gates are withdrawn, and soon thou shalt behold a sight which even he who abhors it must pity.

(*The central door of the palace is now opened.* OEDIPUS *comes forth, leaning on attendants; the bloody stains are still upon his face. The following lines between* OEDIPUS *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

O dread fate for men to see, O most dreadful of all that have met mine eyes! Unhappy one, what madness hath come on thee? Who is the unearthly foe that, with a bound of more than mortal range, hath made thine ill-starred life his prey?

Alas, alas, thou hapless one! Nay, I cannot e'en look on thee, though there is much that I would fain ask, fain learn, much that draws my wistful gaze,—with such a shuddering dost thou fill me!

OEDIPUS

Woe is me! Alas, alas, wretched that I am! Whither, whither am I borne in my misery? How is my voice swept abroad on the wings of the air? Oh my Fate, how far hast thou sprung!

CHORUS

To a dread place, dire in men's ears, dire in their sight.

OEDIPUS

strophe 1

O thou horror of darkness that enfoldest me, visitant unspeakable, resistless, sped by a wind too fair!

Ay me! and once again, ay me!

How is my soul pierced by the stab of these goads, and withal by the memory of sorrows!

CHORUS

Yea, amid woes so many a twofold pain may well be thine to mourn and to bear.

OEDIPUS

antistrophe 1

Ah, friend, thou still art steadfast in thy tendance of me,—thou still hast patience to care for the blind man! Ah me! Thy presence is not hid from me—no, dark though I am, yet know I thy voice full well.

CHORUS

Man of dread deeds, how couldst thou in such wise quench thy vision? What more than human power urged thee?

OEDIPUS

strophe 2

Apollo, friends, Apollo was he that brought these my woes to pass, these my sore, sore woes: but the hand that struck the eyes was none save mine, wretched that I am! Why was I to see, when sight could show me nothing sweet?

CHORUS

These things were even as thou sayest.

OEDIPUS

Say, friends, what can I more behold, what can I love, what greeting can touch mine ear with joy? Haste, lead me from the land, friends, lead me hence, the utterly lost, the thrice accursed, yea, the mortal most abhorred of heaven!

CHORUS

Wretched alike for thy fortune and for thy sense thereof, would that I had never so much as known thee!

OEDIPUS

antistrophe 2

Perish the man, whoe'er he was, that freed me in the pastures from the cruel shackle on my feet, and saved me from death, and gave me back to life,—a thankless deed! Had I died then, to my friends and to thine own soul I had not been so sore a grief.

CHORUS

I also would have had it thus.

OEDIPUS

So had I not come to shed my father's blood, nor been called among men the spouse of her from whom I sprang: but now am I forsaken of the gods, son of a defiled mother, successor to his bed who gave me mine own wretched being: and if there be yet a woe surpassing woes, it hath become the portion of Oedipus.

CHORUS

I know not how I can say that thou hast counselled well: for thou wert better dead than living and blind.

OEDIPUS

Show me not at large that these things are not best done thus: give me counsel no more. For, had I sight, I know not with what eyes I could e'en have looked on my father, when I came to the place of the dead, aye, or on my miserable mother, since against both I have sinned such sins as strangling could not punish. But deem ye that the sight of children, born as mine were born, was lovely for me to look upon? No, no, not lovely to mine eyes for ever! No, nor was this town with its towered walls, nor the sacred statues of the gods, since I, thrice wretched that I am,—I, noblest of the sons of Thebes,—have doomed myself to know these no more, by mine own command that all should thrust away the impious one,

—even him whom gods have shown to be unholy—and of the race of Laïus!

After bearing such a stain upon me, was I to look with steady eyes on this folk? No, verily: no, were there yet a way to choke the fount of hearing, I had not spared to make a fast prison of this wretched frame, that so I should have known nor sight nor sound; for 'tis sweet that our thought should dwell beyond the sphere of griefs.

Alas, Cithaeron, why hadst thou a shelter for me? When I was given to thee, why didst thou not slay me straightway, that so I might never have revealed my source to men? Ah, Polybus,—ah, Corinth, and thou that wast called the ancient house of my fathers, how seeming-fair was I your nurseling, and what ills were festering beneath! For now I am found evil, and of evil birth. O ye three roads, and thou secret glen,—thou coppice, and narrow way where three paths met—ye who drank from my hands that father's blood which was mine own,—remember ye, perchance, what deeds I wrought for you to see,—and then, when I came hither, what fresh deeds I went on to do?

O marriage-rites, ye gave me birth, and when ye had brought me forth, again ye bore children to your child, ye created an incestuous kinship of fathers, brothers, sons,—brides, wives, mothers,—yea, all the foulest shame that is wrought among men! Nay, but 'tis unmeet to name what 'tis unmeet to do:—haste ye, for the gods' love, hide me somewhere beyond the land, or slay me, or cast me into the sea, where ye shall never behold me more! Approach,—deign to lay your hands on a wretched man; —hearken, fear not,—my plague can rest on no mortal beside.

(*Enter* CREON)

LEADER

Nay, here is Creon, in meet season for thy requests, crave they act or counsel; for he alone is left to guard the land in thy stead.

OEDIPUS

Ah me, how indeed shall I accost him? What claim to credence can be shown on my part? For in the past I have been found wholly false to him.

CREON

I have not come in mockery, Oedipus, nor to reproach thee with any bygone fault. (*To the attendants.*) But ye, if ye respect the children of men no more, revere at least the all-nurturing flame of our lord the Sun,—spare to show thus nakedly a pollution such as this,—one which neither earth can welcome, nor the holy rain, nor the light. Nay, take him into the house as quickly as ye may; for it best accords with piety that kinsfolk alone should see and hear a kinsman's woes.

OEDIPUS

For the gods' love—since thou hast done a gentle violence to my presage, who hast come in a spirit so noble to me, a man most vile—grant me a boon:—for thy good I will speak, not for mine own.

CREON

And what wish art thou so fain to have of me?

OEDIPUS

Cast me out of this land with all speed, to a place where no mortal shall be found to greet me more.

CREON

This would I have done, be thou sure, but that I craved first to learn all my duty from the god.

OEDIPUS

Nay, his behest hath been set forth in full,—to let me perish, the parricide, the unholy one, that I am.

CREON

Such was the purport; yet, seeing to what a pass we have come, 'tis better to learn clearly what should be done.

OEDIPUS

Will ye, then, seek a response on behalf of such a wretch as I am?

CREON

Aye, for thou thyself wilt now surely put faith in the god.

OEDIPUS

Yea; and on thee lay I this charge, to thee will I make this entreaty:—give to her who is within such burial as thou thyself wouldest; for thou wilt meetly render the last rites to thine own. But for me—never let this city of my sire be condemned to have me dwelling therein, while I live: no, suffer me to abide on the hills, where yonder is Cithaeron, famed as mine,—which my mother and sire, while they lived, set for my appointed tomb,—that so I may die by their decree who sought to slay me. Howbeit of thus much am I sure,—that neither sickness nor aught else can destroy me; for never had I been snatched from death, but in reserve for some strange doom.

Nay, let *my* fate go whither it will: but as touching my children,—I pray thee, Creon, take no care on thee for my sons; they are men, so that, be they where they may, they can never lack the means to live. But my two girls, poor hapless ones,—who never knew my table spread apart, or lacked their father's presence, but ever in all things shared my daily

bread,—I pray thee, care for *them;* and—if thou canst—suffer me to touch them with my hands, and to indulge my grief. Grant it, prince, grant it, thou noble heart! Ah, could I but once touch them with my hands, I should think that they were with me, even as when I had sight. . .

(CREON'S *attendants lead in the children* ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE.)

Ha? O ye gods, can it be my loved ones that I hear sobbing,—can Creon have taken pity on me and sent me my children—my darlings? Am I right?

CREON

Yea: 'tis of my contriving, for I knew thy joy in them of old,—the joy that now is thine.

OEDIPUS

Then blessed be thou, and, for guerdon of this errand, may heaven prove to thee a kinder guardian than it hath to me! My children, where are ye? Come hither,—hither to the hands of him whose mother was your own, the hands whose offices have wrought that your sire's once bright eyes should be such orbs as these,—his, who seeing nought, knowing nought, became your father by her from whom he sprang! For you also do I weep—behold you I cannot—when I think of the bitter life in days to come which men will make you live. To what company of the citizens will ye go, to what festival, from which ye shall not return home in tears, instead of sharing in the holiday? But when ye are now come to years ripe for marriage, who shall he be, who shall be the man, my daughters, that will hazard taking unto him such reproaches as must be baneful alike to my offspring and to yours? For what misery is wanting? Your sire slew his sire, he had seed of her who bare him, and begat you at the sources of his own being! Such are the taunts that will be cast at you; and who then will wed? The man lives not, no, it cannot be, my children, but ye must wither in barren maidenhood.

Ah, son of Menoeceus, hear me—since thou art the only father left to them, for we, their parents, are lost, both of us,—allow them not to wander poor and unwed, who are thy kinswomen, nor abase them to the level of my woes. Nay, pity them, when thou seest them at this tender age so utterly forlorn, save for thee. Signify thy promise, generous man, by the touch of thy hand! To you, my children, I would have given much counsel, were your minds mature; but now I would have this to be your prayer —that ye live where occasion suffers, and that the life which is your portion may be happier than your sire's.

CREON

Thy grief hath had large scope enough: nay, pass into the house.

OEDIPUS

I must obey, though 'tis in no wise sweet.

CREON

Yea: for it is in season that all things are good.

OEDIPUS

Knowest thou, then, on what conditions I will go?

CREON

Thou shalt name them; so shall I know them when I hear.

OEDIPUS

See that thou send me to dwell beyond this land.

CREON

Thou askest me for what the god must give.

OEDIPUS

Nay, to the gods I have become most hateful.

CREON

Then shalt thou have thy wish anon.

OEDIPUS

So thou consentest?

CREON

'Tis not my wont to speak idly what I do not mean.

OEDIPUS

Then 'tis time to lead me hence.

CREON

Come, then,—but let thy children go.

OEDIPUS

Nay, take not these from me!

CREON

Crave not to be master in all things: for the mastery which thou didst win hath not followed thee through life.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Dwellers in our native Thebes, behold, this is Oedipus, who knew the famed riddle, and was a man most mighty; on whose fortunes what citizen did not gaze with envy? Behold into what a stormy sea of dread trouble he hath come!

Therefore, while our eyes wait to see the destined final day, we must call no one happy who is of mortal race, until he hath crossed life's border, free from pain.[3]

NOTES FOR OEDIPUS THE KING

1. Jebb has inserted this line for one which he believes has been lost.
2. The reference is to Hermes.
3. These last lines evidently derive from a maxim traditionally attributed to Solon in antiquity. The thought is found frequently in Greek tragedy.

III
ANTIGONE

Characters in the Play

Antigone, Ismene — *daughters of Oedipus*
Creon, *King of Thebes*
Eurydice, *his wife*
Haemon, *his son*
Teiresias, *the blind prophet*
Guard, *set to watch the corpse of Polyneices*
First Messenger
Second Messenger, *from the house*
Chorus of Theban Elders

INTRODUCTION

THREE of the extant plays of Sophocles interpret aspects of the familiar Theban saga. The *Antigone,* the earliest of the three, being written probably about 442 B.C., treats the latest events of the legend. The second, *Oedipus the King,* deals with the early part of the story, while the third, *Oedipus at Colonus,* the crowning achievement of Sophocles' old age, presents the last hours and death of Oedipus, which in the chronology of the legend fall between the episodes of *Oedipus the King* and the *Antigone.* Although Sophocles follows in its general outlines the received version of the legend, he has not scrupled to alter it or change its emphases in order to serve his own particular dramatic purpose. For example, Creon is a very sympathetic character in *Oedipus the King,* whereas he is portrayed quite differently in the *Antigone.*

According to the legend, Eteocles, son of Oedipus and now king of Thebes, had exiled his brother, Polyneices, who also desired to hold the royal power. Polyneices had enlisted the support of Argos, and had led a tremendous host against Thebes in order to seize the throne. In the battle which then ensued, the brothers, who met in individual combat, fell each by the other's hand, and fulfilled thereby the curse which their father, Oedipus, had called down upon them just before his death. The Argive host has been repulsed, and Creon has assumed the vacant throne. The action of the *Antigone* takes place on the day after the battle. Creon has just issued a proclamation that the body of Eteocles shall be given the full funeral honours due a hero, while the corpse of Polyneices shall lie unburied. At this point the play opens.

The central conflict of the play between Antigone and Creon is presented in simple terms, and derives, on the surface, from the conventional Greek attitude towards burial ritual. Creon has inflicted upon the dead Polyneices a punishment which the Greeks looked upon with peculiar terror, namely that his body should not receive the requisite funeral rites. In fact, the problem is precisely that which preoccupied Sophocles in the closing scenes of his *Ajax.* However, in the *Antigone,* the poet has universalized the conflict which arises from this particular situation, until it becomes basically a question whether man-made and tyrannically en-

forced law should take precedence over what any individual conceives in his heart to be divine law. Creon endeavours to impose his human law on Antigone, who disobeys out of respect for a higher law.

Creon is distinctly a tragic figure, who holds firmly to what he believes to be right and who has no doubts as to the absolute validity of his beliefs. Nothing shakes him, not even the criticism and open opposition of his son, Haemon, with whom Creon is sharply contrasted, until it is too late and the catastrophe has already occurred. Creon gains in stature at the conclusion because he realizes his guilt and assumes responsibility for it. In many respects he is not unlike Pentheus, in Euripides' *Bacchae.* As for Antigone, critics are divided in their interpretations. Some hold that she is guilty of pride, *hybris,* and that she is sufferng from an absurd and stubborn desire to become a martyr. Others insist that she is unswervingly and magnificently devoted to her ideals for which she is willing to sacrifice her life, that she does not possess any "tragic flaw" in any sense of the word, and that her fate is completely undeserved. Whatever may be a satisfactory interpretation of her character, at least it is certain that Sophocles has created a living and a vital figure in Antigone. Her devotion to her ideals may perhaps lead her to a somewhat uncompromising harshness towards her sister, but Sophocles makes it clear that she has within her a warmth and gentleness of spirit which she has suppressed but which are revealed, now in her love for Haemon, and now when she asks pathetically, as she is led away to death, why it is that she suffers.

One is tempted to formulate clearly the major issues of the play and forget that they are fused with other varied elements in such a way that the resultant work of art possesses great richness. To cite examples of this richness, one need only mention the brilliant choral ode on the wonders of man, the realistic and somewhat comic treatment of the Guard, or the scene between Haemon and Creon which contains political implications of great significance. As a result, though the *Antigone* may not be the equal of *Oedipus the King,* either in point of technique or of universal meaning, yet it remains one of the most satisfying of all the Greek tragedies.

ANTIGONE

(SCENE:—*The same as in the Oedipus the King, an open space before the royal palace, once that of Oedipus, at Thebes. The backscene represents the front of the palace, with three doors, of which the central and largest is the principal entrance into the house. The time is at daybreak on the morning after the fall of the two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, and the flight of the defeated Argives.* ANTIGONE *calls* ISMENE *forth from the palace, in order to speak to her alone.*)

ANTIGONE

ISMENE, sister, mine own dear sister, knowest thou what ill there is, of all bequeathed by Oedipus, that Zeus fulfils not for us twain while we live? Nothing painful is there, nothing fraught with ruin, no shame, no dishonour, that I have not seen in thy woes and mine.

And now what new edict is this of which they tell, that our Captain hath just published to all Thebes? Knowest thou aught? Hast thou heard? Or is it hidden from thee that our friends are threatened with the doom of our foes?

ISMENE

No word of friends, Antigone, gladsome or painful, hath come to me, since we two sisters were bereft of brothers twain, killed in one day by a twofold blow; and since in this last night the Argive host hath fled, I know no more, whether my fortune be brighter, or more grievous.

ANTIGONE

I knew it well, and therefore sought to bring thee beyond the gates of the court, that thou mightest hear alone.

ISMENE

What is it? 'Tis plain that thou art brooding on some dark tidings.

ANTIGONE

What, hath not Creon destined our brothers, the one to honoured burial, the other to unburied shame? Eteocles, they say, with due observance of right and custom, he hath laid in the earth, for his honour among the

dead below. But the hapless corpse of Polyneices—as rumour saith, it hath been published to the town that none shall entomb him or mourn, but leave unwept, unsepulchred, a welcome store for the birds, as they espy him, to feast on at will.

Such, 'tis said, is the edict that the good Creon hath set forth for thee and for me,—yes, for *me*,—and is coming hither to proclaim it clearly to those who know it not; nor counts the matter light, but, whoso disobeys in aught, his doom is death by stoning before all the folk. Thou knowest it now; and thou wilt soon show whether thou art nobly bred, or the base daughter of a noble line.

ISMENE

Poor sister,—and if things stand thus, what could I help to do or undo?

ANTIGONE

Consider if thou wilt share the toil and the deed.

ISMENE

In what venture? What can be thy meaning?

ANTIGONE

Wilt thou aid this hand to lift the dead?

ISMENE

Thou wouldst bury him,—when 'tis forbidden to Thebes?

ANTIGONE

I will do my part,—and thine, if thou wilt not,—to a brother. False to him will I never be found.

ISMENE

Ah, over-bold! when Creon hath forbidden?

ANTIGONE

Nay, he hath no right to keep me from mine own.

ISMENE

Ah me! think, sister, how our father perished, amid hate and scorn, when sins bared by his own search had moved him to strike both eyes with self-blinding hand; then the mother wife, two names in one, with twisted noose did despite unto her life; and last, our two brothers in one day,—each shedding, hapless one, a kinsman's blood,—wrought out with mutual hands their common doom. And now *we* in turn—we two left all alone—think how we shall perish, more miserably than all the rest, if, in defiance of the law, we brave a king's decree or his powers. Nay, we must remember, first, that we were born women, as who should not strive with men;

next, that we are ruled of the stronger, so that we must obey in these things, and in things yet sorer. I, therefore, asking the Spirits Infernal to pardon, seeing that force is put on me herein, will hearken to our rulers; for 'tis witless to be over busy.

ANTIGONE

I will not urge thee,—no, nor, if thou yet shouldst have the mind, wouldst thou be welcome as a worker with *me*. Nay, be what thou wilt; but I will bury him: well for me to die in doing that. I shall rest, a loved one with him whom I have loved, sinless in my crime; for I owe a longer allegiance to the dead than to the living: in that world I shall abide for ever. But if *thou* wilt, be guilty of dishonouring laws which the gods have stablished in honour.

ISMENE

I do them no dishonour; but to defy the State,—I have no strength for that.

ANTIGONE

Such be thy plea:—I, then, will go to heap the earth above the brother whom I love.

ISMENE

Alas, unhappy one! How I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE

Fear not for me: guide thine own fate aright.

ISMENE

At least, then, disclose this plan to none, but hide it closely,—and so, too, will I.

ANTIGONE

Oh, denounce it! Thou wilt be far more hateful for thy silence, if thou proclaim not these things to all.

ISMENE

Thou hast a hot heart for chilling deeds.

ANTIGONE

I know that I please where I am most bound to please.

ISMENE

Aye, if thou canst; but thou wouldst what thou canst not.

ANTIGONE

Why, then, when my strength fails, I shall have done.

ISMENE

A hopeless quest should not be made at all.

ANTIGONE

If thus thou speakest, thou wilt have hatred from me, and will justly be subject to the lasting hatred of the dead. But leave me, and the folly that is mine alone, to suffer this dread thing; for I shall not suffer aught so dreadful as an ignoble death.

ISMENE

Go, then, if thou must; and of this be sure,—that, though thine errand is foolish, to thy dear ones thou art truly dear.

(*Exit* ANTIGONE *on the spectators' left.* ISMENE *retires into the palace by one of the two side-doors. When they have departed, the* CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Beam of the sun, fairest light that ever dawned on Thebe of the seven gates, thou hast shone forth at last, eye of golden day, arisen above Dirce's streams! The warrior of the white shield, who came from Argos in his panoply, hath been stirred by thee to headlong flight, in swifter career;

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

systema 1

who set forth against our land by reason of the vexed claims of Polyneices; and, like shrill-screaming eagle, he flew over into our land, in snow-white pinion sheathed, with an armèd throng, and with plumage of helms.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

He paused above our dwellings; he ravened around our sevenfold portals with spears athirst for blood; but he went hence, or ever his jaws were glutted with our gore, or the Fire-god's pine-fed flame had seized our crown of towers. So fierce was the noise of battle raised behind him, a thing too hard for him to conquer, as he wrestled with his dragon foe.

LEADER

systema 2

For Zeus utterly abhors the boasts of a proud tongue; and when he beheld them coming on in a great stream, in the haughty pride of

clanging gold, he smote with brandished fire one who was now hasting to shout victory at his goal upon our ramparts.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Swung down, he fell on the earth with a crash, torch in hand, he who so lately, in the frenzy of the mad onset, was raging against us with the blasts of his tempestuous hate. But those threats fared not as he hoped; and to other foes the mighty War-god dispensed their several dooms, dealing havoc around, a mighty helper at our need.

LEADER

systema 3

For seven captains at seven gates, matched against seven, left the tribute of their panoplies to Zeus who turns the battle; save those two of cruel fate, who, born of one sire and one mother, set against each other their twain conquering spears, and are sharers in a common death.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

But since Victory of glorious name hath come to us, with joy responsive to the joy of Thebe whose chariots are many, let us enjoy forgetfulness after the late wars, and visit all the temples of the gods with night-long dance and song; and may Bacchus be our leader, whose dancing shakes the land of Thebe.

LEADER

systema 4

But lo, the king of the land comes yonder, Creon, son of Menoeceus, our new ruler by the new fortunes that the gods have given; what counsel is he pondering, that he hath proposed this special conference of elders, summoned by his general mandate?

(*Enter* CREON, *from the central doors of the palace, in the garb of king, with two attendants.*)

CREON

Sirs, the vessel of our State, after being tossed on wild waves, hath once more been safely steadied by the gods: and ye, out of all the folk, have been called apart by my summons, because I knew, first of all, how true and constant was your reverence for the royal power of Laïus; how, again, when Oedipus was ruler of our land, and when he had perished, your steadfast loyalty still upheld their children. Since, then, his sons have fallen in one day by a twofold doom,—each smitten by the other,

each stained with a brother's blood,—I now possess the throne and all its powers, by nearness of kinship to the dead.

No man can be fully known, in soul and spirit and mind, until he hath been seen versed in rule and law-giving. For if any, being supreme guide of the State, cleaves not to the best counsels, but, through some fear, keeps his lips locked, I hold, and have ever held, him most base; and if any makes a friend of more account than his fatherland, that man hath no place in my regard. For I—be Zeus my witness, who sees all things always—would not be silent if I saw ruin, instead of safety, coming to the citizens; nor would I ever deem the country's foe a friend to myself; remembering this, that our country is the ship that bears us safe, and that only while she prospers in our voyage can we make true friends.

Such are the rules by which I guard this city's greatness. And in accord with them is the edict which I have now published to the folk touching the sons of Oedipus;—that Eteocles, who hath fallen fighting for our city, in all renown of arms, shall be entombed, and crowned with every rite that follows the noblest dead to their rest. But for his brother, Polyneices,—who came back from exile, and sought to consume utterly with fire the city of his fathers and the shrines of his fathers' gods,—sought to taste of kindred blood, and to lead the remnant into slavery;—touching this man, it hath been proclaimed to our people that none shall grace him with sepulture or lament, but leave him unburied, a corpse for birds and dogs to eat, a ghastly sight of shame.

Such the spirit of my dealing; and never, by deed of mine, shall the wicked stand in honour before the just; but whoso hath good will to Thebes, he shall be honoured of me, in his life and in his death.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Such is thy pleasure, Creon, son of Menoeceus, touching this city's foe, and its friend; and thou hast power, I ween, to take what order thou wilt, both for the dead, and for all us who live.

CREON

See, then, that ye be guardians of the mandate.

LEADER

Lay the burden of this task on some younger man.

CREON

Nay, watchers of the corpse have been found.

LEADER

What, then, is this further charge that thou wouldst give?

CREON

That ye side not with the breakers of these commands.

LEADER

No man is so foolish that he is enamoured of death.

CREON

In sooth, that is the meed; yet lucre hath oft ruined men through their hopes.

(*A* GUARD *enters from the spectators' left.*)

GUARD

My liege, I will not say that I come breathless from speed, or that I have plied a nimble foot; for often did my thoughts make me pause, and wheel round in my path, to return. My mind was holding large discourse with me; 'Fool, why goest thou to thy certain doom?' 'Wretch, tarrying again? And if Creon hears this from another, must not thou smart for it?' So debating, I went on my way with lagging steps, and thus a short road was made long. At last, however, it carried the day that I should come hither—to thee; and, though my tale be nought, yet will I tell it; for I come with a good grip on one hope,—that I can suffer nothing but what is my fate.

CREON

And what is it that disquiets thee thus?

GUARD

I wish to tell thee first about myself—I did not do the deed—I did not see the doer—it were not right that I should come to any harm.

CREON

Thou hast a shrewd eye for thy mark; well dost thou fence thyself round against the blame; clearly thou hast some strange thing to tell.

GUARD

Aye, truly; dread news makes one pause long.

CREON

Then tell it, wilt thou, and so get thee gone?

GUARD

Well, this is it.—The corpse—some one hath just given it burial, and gone away,—after sprinkling thirsty dust on the flesh, with such other rites as piety enjoins.

CREON

What sayest thou? What living man hath dared this deed?

GUARD

I know not; no stroke of pickaxe was seen there, no earth thrown up by mattock; the ground was hard and dry, unbroken, without track of wheels; the doer was one who had left no trace. And when the first day-watchman showed it to us, sore wonder fell on all. The dead man was veiled from us; not shut within a tomb, but lightly strewn with dust, as by the hand of one who shunned a curse. And no sign met the eye as though any beast of prey or any dog had come nigh to him, or torn him.

Then evil words flew fast and loud among us, guard accusing guard; and it would e'en have come to blows at last, nor was there any to hinder. Every man was the culprit, and no one was convicted, but all disclaimed knowledge of the deed. And we were ready to take red-hot iron in our hands;—to walk through fire;—to make oath by the gods that we had not done the deed,—that we were not privy to the planning or the doing.

At last, when all our searching was fruitless, one spake, who made us all bend our faces on the earth in fear; for we saw not how we could gainsay him, or escape mischance if we obeyed. His counsel was that this deed must be reported to thee, and not hidden. And this seemed best; and the lot doomed my hapless self to win this prize. So here I stand,—as unwelcome as unwilling, well I wot; for no man delights in the bearer of bad news.

LEADER

O king, my thoughts have long been whispering, can this deed, perchance, be e'en the work of gods?

CREON

Cease, ere thy words fill me utterly with wrath, lest thou be found at once an old man and foolish. For thou sayest what is not to be borne, in saying that the gods have care for this corpse. Was it for high reward of trusty service that they sought to hide his nakedness, who came to burn their pillared shrines and sacred treasures, to burn their land, and scatter its laws to the winds? Or dost thou behold the gods honouring the wicked? It cannot be. No! From the first there were certain in the town that muttered against me, chafing at this edict, wagging their heads in secret; and kept not their necks duly under the yoke, like men contented with my sway.

'Tis by them, well I know, that these have been beguiled and bribed to do this deed. Nothing so evil as money ever grew to be current among men. This lays cities low, this drives men from their homes, this trains and warps honest souls till they set themselves to works of shame; this

still teaches folk to practise villainies, and to know every godless deed.

But all the men who wrought this thing for hire have made it sure that, soon or late, they shall pay the price. Now, as Zeus still hath my reverence, know this—I tell it thee on my oath:—If ye find not the very author of this burial, and produce him before mine eyes, death alone shall not be enough for you, till first, hung up alive, ye have revealed this outrage,—that henceforth ye may thieve with better knowledge whence lucre should be won, and learn that it is not well to love gain from every source. For thou wilt find that ill-gotten pelf brings more men to ruin than to weal.

GUARD

May I speak? Or shall I just turn and go?

CREON

Knowest thou not that even now thy voice offends?

GUARD

Is thy smart in the ears, or in the soul?

CREON

And why wouldst thou define the seat of my pain?

GUARD

The doer vexes thy mind, but I, thine ears.

CREON

Ah, thou art a born babbler, 'tis well seen.

GUARD

May be, but never the doer of this deed.

CREON

Yea, and more,—the seller of thy life for silver.

GUARD

Alas! 'Tis sad, truly, that he who judges should misjudge.

CREON

Let thy fancy play with 'judgment' as it will;—but, if ye show me not the doers of these things, ye shall avow that dastardly gains work sorrows.

(CREON *goes into the palace.*)

GUARD

Well, may he be found! so 'twere best. But, be he caught or be he not—fortune must settle that—truly thou wilt not see me here again. Saved, even now, beyond hope and thought, I owe the gods great thanks.

(*The* GUARD *goes out on the spectators' left.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man; the power that crosses the white sea, driven by the stormy south-wind, making a path under surges that threaten to engulf him; and Earth, the eldest of the gods, the immortal, the unwearied, doth he wear, turning the soil with the offspring of horses, as the ploughs go to and fro from year to year.

antistrophe 1

And the light-hearted race of birds, and the tribes of savage beasts, and the sea-brood of the deep, he snares in the meshes of his woven toils, he leads captive, man excellent in wit. And he masters by his arts the beast whose lair is in the wilds, who roams the hills; he tames the horse of shaggy mane, he puts the yoke upon its neck, he tames the tireless mountain bull.

strophe 2

And speech, and wind-swift thought, and all the moods that mould a state, hath he taught himself; and how to flee the arrows of the frost, when 'tis hard lodging under the clear sky, and the arrows of the rushing rain; yea, he hath resource for all; without resource he meets nothing that must come: only against Death shall he call for aid in vain; but from baffling maladies he hath devised escapes.

antistrophe 2

Cunning beyond fancy's dream is the fertile skill which brings him, now to evil, now to good. When he honours the laws of the land, and that justice which he hath sworn by the gods to uphold, proudly stands his city: no city hath he who, for his rashness, dwells with sin. Never may he share my hearth, never think my thoughts, who doth these things!

(*Enter the* GUARD *on the spectators' left, leading in* ANTIGONE.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What portent from the gods is this?—my soul is amazed. I know her—how can I deny that yon maiden is Antigone?

O hapless, and child of hapless sire,—of Oedipus! What means this? Thou brought a prisoner?—thou, disloyal to the king's laws, and taken in folly?

GUARD

Here she is, the doer of the deed:—we caught this girl burying him:—but where is Creon?

(CREON *enters hurriedly from the palace.*)

LEADER

Lo, he comes forth again from the house, at our need.

CREON

What is it? What hath chanced, that makes my coming timely?

GUARD

O king, against nothing should men pledge their word; for the afterthought belies the first intent. I could have vowed that I should not soon be here again,—scared by thy threats, with which I had just been lashed: but,—since the joy that surprises and transcends our hopes is like in fulness to no other pleasure,—I have come, though 'tis in breach of my sworn oath, bringing this maid; who was taken showing grace to the dead. This time there was no casting of lots; no, this luck hath fallen to me, and to none else. And now, sire, take her thyself, question her, examine her, as thou wilt; but I have a right to free and final quittance of this trouble.

CREON

And thy prisoner here—how and whence hast thou taken her?

GUARD

She was burying the man; thou knowest all.

CREON

Dost thou mean what thou sayest? Dost thou speak aright?

GUARD

I saw her burying the corpse that thou hadst forbidden to bury. Is that plain and clear?

CREON

And how was she seen? how taken in the act?

GUARD

It befell on this wise. When we had come to the place,—with those dread menaces of thine upon us,—we swept away all the dust that covered the corpse, and bared the dank body well; and then sat us down on the brow of the hill, to windward, heedful that the smell from him should not strike us; every man was wide awake, and kept his neighbour alert with torrents of threats, if anyone should be careless of this task.

So went it, until the sun's bright orb stood in mid heaven, and the heat began to burn: and then suddenly a whirlwind lifted from the earth a

storm of dust, a trouble in the sky, and filled the plain, marring all the leafage of its woods; and the wide air was choked therewith: we closed our eyes, and bore the plague from the gods.

And when, after a long while, this storm had passed, the maid was seen; and she cried aloud with the sharp cry of a bird in its bitterness,—even as when, within the empty nest, it sees the bed stripped of its nestlings. So she also, when she saw the corpse bare, lifted up a voice of wailing, and called down curses on the doers of that deed. And straightway she brought thirsty dust in her hands; and from a shapely ewer of bronze, held high, with thrice-poured drink-offering she crowned the dead.

We rushed forward when we saw it, and at once closed upon our quarry, who was in no wise dismayed. Then we taxed her with her past and present doings; and she stood not on denial of aught,—at once to my joy and to my pain. To have escaped from ills one's self is a great joy; but 'tis painful to bring friends to ill. Howbeit, all such things are of less account to me than mine own safety.

CREON

Thou—thou whose face is bent to earth—dost thou avow, or disavow, this deed?

ANTIGONE

I avow it; I make no denial.

CREON (*to* GUARD)

Thou canst betake thee whither thou wilt, free and clear of a grave charge.

(*Exit* GUARD)

(*To* ANTIGONE) Now, tell me thou—not in many words, but briefly—knewest thou that an edict had forbidden this?

ANTIGONE

I knew it: could I help it? It was public.

CREON

And thou didst indeed dare to transgress that law?

ANTIGONE

Yes; for it was not Zeus that had published me that edict; not such are the laws set among men by the Justice who dwells with the gods below; nor deemed I that thy decrees were of such force, that a mortal could override the unwritten and unfailing statutes of heaven. For their life is not of to-day or yesterday, but from all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth.

Not through dread of any human pride could I answer to the gods for

breaking *these*. Die I must,—I knew that well (how should I not?)—even without thy edicts. But if I am to die before my time, I count that a gain: for when any one lives, as I do, compassed about with evils, can such an one find aught but gain in death?

So for me to meet this doom is trifling grief; but if I had suffered my mother's son to lie in death an unburied corpse, that would have grieved me; for this, I am not grieved. And if my present deeds are foolish in thy sight, it may be that a foolish judge arraigns my folly.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The maid shows herself passionate child of passionate sire, and knows not how to bend before troubles.

CREON

Yet I would have thee know that o'er-stubborn spirits are most often humbled; 'tis the stiffest iron, baked to hardness in the fire, that thou shalt oftenest see snapped and shivered; and I have known horses that show temper brought to order by a little curb; there is no room for pride, when thou art thy neighbour's slave.—This girl was already versed in insolence when she transgressed the laws that had been set forth; and, that done, lo, a second insult,—to vaunt of this, and exult in her deed.

Now verily I am no man, she is the man, if this victory shall rest with her, and bring no penalty. No! be she sister's child, or nearer to me in blood than any that worships Zeus at the altar of our house,—she and her kinsfolk shall not avoid a doom most dire; for indeed I charge that other with a like share in the plotting of this burial.

And summon her—for I saw her e'en now within,—raving, and not mistress of her wits. So oft, before the deed, the mind stands self-convicted in its treason, when folks are plotting mischief in the dark. But verily this, too, is hateful,—when one who hath been caught in wickedness then seeks to make the crime a glory.

ANTIGONE

Wouldst thou do more than take and slay me?

CREON

No more, indeed; having that, I have all.

ANTIGONE

Why then dost thou delay? In thy discourse there is nought that pleases me,—never may there be!—and so my words must needs be unpleasing to thee. And yet, for glory—whence could I have won a nobler, than by giving burial to mine own brother? All here would own that they thought it well, were not their lips sealed by fear. But royalty, blest in so much besides, hath the power to do and say what it will.

CREON
Thou differest from all these Thebans in that view.

ANTIGONE
These also share it; but they curb their tongues for thee.

CREON
And art thou not ashamed to act apart from them?

ANTIGONE
No; there is nothing shameful in piety to a brother.

CREON
Was it not a brother, too, that died in the opposite cause?

ANTIGONE
Brother by the same mother and the same sire.

CREON
Why, then, dost thou render a grace that is impious in his sight?

ANTIGONE
The dead man will not say that he so deems it.

CREON
Yea, if thou makest him but equal in honour with the wicked.

ANTIGONE
It was his brother, not his slave, that perished.

CREON
Wasting this land; while *he* fell as its champion.

ANTIGONE
Nevertheless, Hades desires these rites.

CREON
But the good desires not a like portion with the evil.

ANTIGONE
Who knows but this seems blameless in the world below?

CREON
A foe is never a friend—not even in death.

ANTIGONE
'Tis not my nature to join in hating, but in loving.

CREON

Pass, then, to the world of the dead, and, if thou must needs love, love them. While I live, no woman shall rule me.

(*Enter* ISMENE *from the house, led in by two attendants.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Lo, yonder Ismene comes forth, shedding such tears as fond sisters weep; a cloud upon her brow casts its shadow over her darkly-flushing face, and breaks in rain on her fair cheek.

CREON

And thou, who, lurking like a viper in my house, wast secretly draining my life-blood, while I knew not that I was nurturing two pests, to rise against my throne—come, tell me now, wilt thou also confess thy part in this burial, or wilt thou forswear all knowledge of it?

ISMENE

I have done the deed,—if she allows my claim,—and share the burden of the charge.

ANTIGONE

Nay, justice will not suffer thee to do that: thou didst not consent to the deed, nor did I give thee part in it.

ISMENE

But, now that ills beset thee, I am not ashamed to sail the sea of trouble at thy side.

ANTIGONE

Whose was the deed, Hades and the dead are witnesses: a friend in words is not the friend that I love.

ISMENE

Nay, sister, reject me not, but let me die with thee, and duly honour the dead.

ANTIGONE

Share not thou my death, nor claim deeds to which thou hast not put thy hand: my death will suffice.

ISMENE

And what life is dear to me, bereft of thee?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon; all thy care is for him.

ISMENE

Why vex me thus, when it avails thee nought?

ANTIGONE

Indeed, if I mock, 'tis with pain that I mock thee.

ISMENE

Tell me,—how can I serve thee, even now?

ANTIGONE

Save thyself: I grudge not thy escape.

ISMENE

Ah, woe is me! And shall I have no share in thy fate?

ANTIGONE

Thy choice was to live; mine, to die.

ISMENE

At least thy choice was not made without my protest.

ANTIGONE

One world approved thy wisdom; another, mine.

ISMENE

Howbeit, the offence is the same for both of us.

ANTIGONE

Be of good cheer; thou livest; but my life hath long been given to death, that so I might serve the dead.

CREON

Lo, one of these maidens hath newly shown herself foolish, as the other hath been since her life began.

ISMENE

Yea, O king, such reason as nature may have given abides not with the unfortunate, but goes astray.

CREON

Thine did, when thou chosest vile deeds with the vile.

ISMENE

What life could I endure, without her presence?

CREON

Nay, speak not of her 'presence'; she lives no more.

ISMENE

But wilt thou slay the betrothed of thine own son?

CREON

Nay, there are other fields for him to plough.

ISMENE

But there can never be such love as bound him to her.

CREON

I like not an evil wife for my son.

ANTIGONE

Haemon, beloved! How thy father wrongs thee!

CREON

Enough, enough of thee and of thy marriage!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Wilt thou indeed rob thy son of this maiden?

CREON

'Tis Death that shall stay these bridals for me.

LEADER

'Tis determined, it seems, that she shall die.

CREON

Determined, yes, for thee and for me.—(*To the two attendants*) No more delay—servants, take them within! Henceforth they must be women, and not range at large; for verily even the bold seek to fly, when they see Death now closing on their life.

(*Exeunt attendants, guarding* ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE.—CREON *remains.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Blest are they whose days have not tasted of evil. For when a house hath once been shaken from heaven, there the curse fails nevermore, passing from life to life of the race; even as, when the surge is driven over the darkness of the deep by the fierce breath of Thracian sea-winds, it rolls up the black sand from the depths, and there is a sullen roar from wind-vexed headlands that front the blows of the storm.

antistrophe 1

I see that from olden time the sorrows in the house of the Labdacidae are heaped upon the sorrows of the dead; and generation is

not freed by generation, but some god strikes them down, and the race hath no deliverance.

For now that hope of which the light had been spread above the last root of the house of Oedipus—that hope, in turn, is brought low —by the blood-stained dust due to the gods infernal, and by folly in speech, and frenzy at the heart.

strophe 2

Thy power, O Zeus, what human trespass can limit? That power which neither Sleep, the all-ensnaring, nor the untiring months of the gods can master; but thou, a ruler to whom time brings not old age, dwellest in the dazzling splendour of Olympus.

And through the future, near and far, as through the past, shall this law hold good: Nothing that is vast enters into the life of mortals without a curse.

antistrophe 2

For that hope whose wanderings are so wide is to many men a comfort, but to many a false lure of giddy desires; and the disappointment comes on one who knoweth nought till he burn his foot against the hot fire.

For with wisdom hath some one given forth the famous saying, that evil seems good, soon or late, to him whose mind the god draws to mischief; and but for the briefest space doth he fare free of woe.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But lo, Haemon, the last of thy sons;—comes he grieving for the doom of his promised bride, Antigone, and bitter for the baffled hope of his marriage?

(*Enter* HAEMON)

CREON

We shall know soon, better than seers could tell us.—My son, hearing the fixed doom of thy betrothed, art thou come in rage against thy father? Or have I thy good will, act how I may?

HAEMON

Father, I am thine; and thou, in thy wisdom, tracest for me rules which I shall follow. No marriage shall be deemed by me a greater gain than thy good guidance.

CREON

Yea, this, my son, should be thy heart's fixed law,—in all things to obey thy father's will. 'Tis for this that men pray to see dutiful children

grow up around them in their homes,—that such may requite their father's foe with evil, and honour, as their father doth, his friend. But he who begets unprofitable children—what shall we say that he hath sown, but troubles for himself, and much triumph for his foes? Then do not thou, my son, at pleasure's beck, dethrone thy reason for a woman's sake; knowing that this is a joy that soon grows cold in clasping arms,—an evil woman to share thy bed and thy home. For what wound could strike deeper than a false friend? Nay, with loathing, and as if she were thine enemy, let this girl go to find a husband in the house of Hades. For since I have taken her, alone of all the city, in open disobedience, I will not make myself a liar to my people—I will slay her.

So let her appeal as she will to the majesty of kindred blood. If I am to nurture mine own kindred in naughtiness, needs must I bear with it in aliens. He who does his duty in his own household will be found righteous in the State also. But if any one transgresses, and does violence to the laws, or thinks to dictate to his rulers, such an one can win no praise from me. No, whomsoever the city may appoint, that man must be obeyed, in little things and great, in just things and unjust; and I should feel sure that one who thus obeys would be a good ruler no less than a good subject, and in the storm of spears would stand his ground where he was set, loyal and dauntless at his comrade's side.

But disobedience is the worst of evils. This it is that ruins cities; this makes homes desolate; by this, the ranks of allies are broken into headlong rout; but, of the lives whose course is fair, the greater part owes safety to obedience. Therefore we must support the cause of order, and in no wise suffer a woman to worst us. Better to fall from power, if we must, by a man's hand; then we should not be called weaker than a woman.

LEADER

To us, unless our years have stolen our wit, thou seemest to say wisely what thou sayest.

HAEMON

Father, the gods implant reason in men, the highest of all things that we call our own. Not mine the skill—far from me be the quest!—to say wherein thou speakest not aright; and yet another man, too, might have some useful thought. At least, it is my natural office to watch, on thy behalf, all that men say, or do, or find to blame. For the dread of thy frown forbids the citizen to speak such words as would offend thine ear; but I can hear these murmurs in the dark, these moanings of the city for this maiden; 'no woman,' they say, 'ever merited her doom less,—none ever was to die so shamefully for deeds so glorious as hers; who, when her own brother had fallen in bloody strife, would not leave him unburied, to be

devoured by carrion dogs, or by any bird:—deserves not *she* the meed of golden honour?'

Such is the darkling rumour that spreads in secret. For me, my father, no treasure is so precious as thy welfare. What, indeed, is a nobler ornament for children than a prospering sire's fair fame, or for sire than son's? Wear not, then, one mood only in thyself; think not that thy word, and thine alone, must be right. For if any man thinks that he alone is wise,—that in speech, or in mind, he hath no peer,—such a soul, when laid open, is ever found empty.

No, though a man be wise, 'tis no shame for him to learn many things, and to bend in season. Seest thou, beside the wintry torrent's course, how the trees that yield to it save every twig, while the stiff-necked perish root and branch? And even thus he who keeps the sheet of his sail taut, and never slackens it, upsets his boat, and finishes his voyage with keel uppermost.

Nay, forego thy wrath; permit thyself to change. For if I, a younger man, may offer my thought, it were far best, I ween, that men should be all-wise by nature; but, otherwise—and oft the scale inclines not so—'tis good also to learn from those who speak aright.

LEADER

Sire, 'tis meet that thou shouldest profit by his words, if he speaks aught in season, and thou, Haemon, by thy father's; for on both parts there hath been wise speech.

CREON

Men of my age—are we indeed to be schooled, then, by men of his?

HAEMON

In nothing that is not right; but if I am young, thou shouldest look to my merits, not to my years.

CREON

Is it a merit to honour the unruly?

HAEMON

I could wish no one to show respect for evil-doers.

CREON

Then is not she tainted with that malady?

HAEMON

Our Theban folk, with one voice, denies it.

CREON

Shall Thebes prescribe to me how I must rule?

HAEMON
See, there thou hast spoken like a youth indeed.

CREON
Am I to rule this land by other judgment than mine own?

HAEMON
That is no city which belongs to one man.

CREON
Is not the city held to be the ruler's?

HAEMON
Thou wouldst make a good monarch of a desert.

CREON
This boy, it seems, is the woman's champion.

HAEMON
If thou art a woman; indeed, my care is for thee.

CREON
Shameless, at open feud with thy father!

HAEMON
Nay, I see thee offending against justice.

CREON
Do I offend, when I respect mine own prerogatives?

HAEMON
Thou dost not respect them, when thou tramplest on the gods' honours.

CREON
O dastard nature, yielding place to woman!

HAEMON
Thou wilt never find me yield to baseness.

CREON
All thy words, at least, plead for that girl.

HAEMON
And for thee, and for me, and for the gods below.

CREON
Thou canst never marry her, on this side the grave.

HAEMON

Then she must die, and in death destroy another.

CREON

How! doth thy boldness run to open threats?

HAEMON

What threat is it, to combat vain resolves?

CREON

Thou shalt rue thy witless teaching of wisdom.

HAEMON

Wert thou not my father, I would have called thee unwise.

CREON

Thou woman's slave, use not wheedling speech with me.

HAEMON

Thou wouldest speak, and then hear no reply?

CREON

Sayest thou so? Now, by the heaven above us—be sure of it—thou shalt smart for taunting me in this opprobrious strain. Bring forth that hated thing, that she may die forthwith in his presence—before his eyes—at her bridegroom's side!

HAEMON

No, not at my side—never think it—shall she perish; nor shalt thou ever set eyes more upon my face:—rave, then, with such friends as can endure thee.

(*Exit* HAEMON)

LEADER

The man is gone, O king, in angry haste; a youthful mind, when stung, is fierce.

CREON

Let him do, or dream, more than man—good speed to him!—But he shall not save these two girls from their doom.

LEADER

Dost thou indeed purpose to slay both?

CREON

Not her whose hands are pure: thou sayest well.

LEADER

And by what doom mean'st thou to slay the other?

CREON

I will take her where the path is loneliest, and hide her, living, in a rocky vault, with so much food set forth as piety prescribes, that the city may avoid a public stain. And there, praying to Hades, the only god whom she worships, perchance she will obtain release from death; or else will learn, at last, though late, that it is lost labour to revere the dead.

(CREON *goes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Love, unconquered in the fight, Love, who makest havoc of wealth, who keepest thy vigil on the soft cheek of a maiden; thou roamest over the sea, and among the homes of dwellers in the wilds; no immortal can escape thee, nor any among men whose life is for a day; and he to whom thou hast come is mad.

antistrophe

The just themselves have their minds warped by thee to wrong, for their ruin: 'tis thou that hast stirred up this present strife of kinsmen; victorious is the love-kindling light from the eyes of the fair bride; it is a power enthroned in sway beside the eternal laws; for there the goddess Aphrodite is working her unconquerable will.

(ANTIGONE *is led out of the palace by two of* CREON'S *attendants who are about to conduct her to her doom.*)

But now I also am carried beyond the bounds of loyalty, and can no more keep back the streaming tears, when I see Antigone thus passing to the bridal chamber where all are laid to rest.

(*The following lines between* ANTIGONE *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

ANTIGONE

strophe 1

See me, citizens of my fatherland, setting forth on my last way, looking my last on the sunlight that is for me no more; no, Hades who gives sleep to all leads me living to Acheron's shore; who have had no portion in the chant that brings the bride, nor hath any song been mine for the crowning of bridals; whom the lord of the Dark Lake shall wed.

CHORUS

systema 1

Glorious, therefore, and with praise, thou departest to that deep place of the dead: wasting sickness hath not smitten thee; thou hast not found the wages of the sword; no, mistress of thine own fate, and still alive, thou shalt pass to Hades, as no other of mortal kind hath passed.

ANTIGONE

antistrophe 1

I have heard in other days how dread a doom befell our Phrygian guest, the daughter of Tantalus, on the Sipylian heights;[1] how, like clinging ivy, the growth of stone subdued her; and the rains fail not, as men tell, from her wasting form, nor fails the snow, while beneath her weeping lids the tears bedew her bosom; and most like to hers is the fate that brings me to my rest.

CHORUS

systema 2

Yet she was a goddess, thou knowest, and born of gods; we are mortals, and of mortal race. But 'tis great renown for a woman who hath perished that she should have shared the doom of the godlike, in her life, and afterward in death.

ANTIGONE

strophe 2

Ah, I am mocked! In the name of our fathers' gods, can ye not wait till I am gone,—must ye taunt me to my face, O my city, and ye, her wealthy sons? Ah, fount of Dirce, and thou holy ground of Thebe whose chariots are many; ye, at least, will bear me witness, in what sort, unwept of friends, and by what laws I pass to the rock-closed prison of my strange tomb, ah me unhappy! who have no home on the earth or in the shades, no home with the living or with the dead.

CHORUS

strophe 3

Thou hast rushed forward to the utmost verge of daring; and against that throne where Justice sits on high thou hast fallen, my daughter, with a grievous fall. But in this ordeal thou art paying, haply, for thy father's sin.

ANTIGONE

antistrophe 2

Thou hast touched on my bitterest thought,—awaking the ever-new lament for my sire and for all the doom given to us, the famed

house of Labdacus. Alas for the horrors of the mother's bed! alas for the wretched mother's slumber at the side of her own son,—and my sire! From what manner of parents did I take my miserable being! And to them I go thus, accursed, unwed, to share their home. Alas, my brother, ill-starred in thy marriage, in thy death thou hast undone my life!

CHORUS

antistrophe 3

Reverent action claims a certain praise for reverence; but an offence against power cannot be brooked by him who hath power in his keeping. Thy self-willed temper hath wrought thy ruin.

ANTIGONE

epode

Unwept, unfriended, without marriage-song, I am led forth in my sorrow on this journey that can be delayed no more. No longer, hapless one, may I behold yon day-star's sacred eye; but for my fate no tear is shed, no friend makes moan.

(CREON *enters from the palace.*)

CREON

Know ye not that songs and wailings before death would never cease, if it profited to utter them? Away with her—away! And when ye have enclosed her, according to my word, in her vaulted grave, leave her alone, forlorn—whether she wishes to die, or to live a buried life in such a home. Our hands are clean as touching this maiden. But this is certain—she shall be deprived of her sojourn in the light.

ANTIGONE

Tomb, bridal-chamber, eternal prison in the caverned rock, whither I go to find mine own, those many who have perished, and whom Persephone hath received among the dead! Last of all shall I pass thither, and far most miserably of all, before the term of my life is spent. But I cherish good hope that my coming will be welcome to my father, and pleasant to thee, my mother, and welcome, brother, to thee; for, when ye died, with mine own hands I washed and dressed you, and poured drink-offerings at your graves; and now, Polyneices, 'tis for tending thy corpse that I win such recompense as this.

And yet I honoured thee, as the wise will deem, rightly. Never, had I been a mother of children, or if a husband had been mouldering in death, would I have taken this task upon me in the city's despite. What law, ye ask, is my warrant for that word? The husband lost, another might have been found, and child from another, to replace the first-born; but, father

and mother hidden with Hades, no brother's life could ever bloom for me again. Such was the law whereby I held thee first in honour; but Creon deemed me guilty of error therein, and of outrage, ah brother mine! And now he leads me thus, a captive in his hands; no bridal bed, no bridal song hath been mine, no joy of marriage, no portion in the nurture of children; but thus, forlorn of friends, unhappy one, I go living to the vaults of death.[2]

And what law of heaven have I transgressed? Why, hapless one, should I look to the gods any more,—what ally should I invoke,—when by piety I have earned the name of impious? Nay, then, if these things are pleasing to the gods, when I have suffered my doom, I shall come to know my sin: but if the sin is with my judges, I could wish them no fuller measure of evil than they, on their part, mete wrongfully to me.

CHORUS

Still the same tempest of the soul vexes this maiden with the same fierce gusts.

CREON

Then for this shall her guards have cause to rue their slowness.

ANTIGONE

Ah me! that word hath come very near to death.

CREON

I can cheer thee with no hope that this doom is not thus to be fulfilled.

ANTIGONE

O city of my fathers in the land of Thebe! O ye gods, eldest of our race!—they lead me hence—now, now—they tarry not! Behold me, princes of Thebes, the last daughter of the house of your kings,—see what I suffer, and from whom, because I feared to cast away the fear of Heaven!

(ANTIGONE *is led away by the guards.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Even thus endured Danae in her beauty to change the light of day for brass-bound walls; and in that chamber, secret as the grave, she was held close prisoner; yet was she of a proud lineage, O my daughter, and charged with the keeping of the seed of Zeus, that fell in the golden rain.

But dreadful is the mysterious power of fate; there is no deliver-

ance from it by wealth or by war, by fenced city, or dark, sea-beaten ships.

antistrophe 1

And bonds tamed the son of Dryas, swift to wrath, that king of the Edonians; so paid he for his frenzied taunts, when, by the will of Dionysus, he was pent in a rocky prison. There the fierce exuberance of his madness slowly passed away. That man learned to know the god, whom in his frenzy he had provoked with mockeries; for he had sought to quell the god-possessed women, and the Bacchanalian fire; and he angered the Muses that love the flute.

strophe 2

And by the waters of the Dark Rocks, the waters of the twofold sea, are the shores of Bosporus, and Thracian Salmydessus; where Ares, neighbour to the city, saw the accurst, blinding wound dealt to the two sons of Phineus by his fierce wife,—the wound that brought darkness to those vengeance-craving orbs, smitten with her bloody hands, smitten with her shuttle for a dagger.

antistrophe 2

Pining in their misery, they bewailed their cruel doom, those sons of a mother hapless in her marriage; but she traced her descent from the ancient line of the Erechtheidae; and in far-distant caves she was nursed amid her father's storms, that child of Boreas, swift as a steed over the steep hills, a daughter of gods; yet upon her also the gray Fates bore hard, my daughter.

(*Enter* TEIRESIAS, *led by a Boy, on the spectators' right.*)

TEIRESIAS

Princes of Thebes, we have come with linked steps, both served by the eyes of one; for thus, by a guide's help, the blind must walk.

CREON

And what, aged Teiresias, are thy tidings?

TEIRESIAS

I will tell thee; and do thou hearken to the seer.

CREON

Indeed, it has not been my wont to slight thy counsel.

TEIRESIAS

Therefore didst thou steer our city's course aright.

CREON

I have felt, and can attest, thy benefits.

TEIRESIAS

Mark that now, once more, thou standest on fate's fine edge.

CREON

What means this? How I shudder at thy message!

TEIRESIAS

Thou wilt learn, when thou hearest the warnings of mine art. As I took my place on mine old seat of augury, where all birds have been wont to gather within my ken, I heard a strange voice among them; they were screaming with dire, feverish rage, that drowned their language in a jargon; and I knew that they were rending each other with their talons, murderously; the whirr of wings told no doubtful tale.

Forthwith, in fear, I essayed burnt-sacrifice on a duly kindled altar: but from my offerings the Fire-god showed no flame; a dank moisture, oozing from the thigh-flesh, trickled forth upon the embers, and smoked, and sputtered; the gall was scattered to the air; and the streaming thighs lay bared of the fat that had been wrapped round them.

Such was the failure of the rites by which I vainly asked a sign, as from this boy I learned; for he is my guide, as I am guide to others. And 'tis thy counsel that hath brought this sickness on our State. For the altars of our city and of our hearths have been tainted, one and all, by birds and dogs, with carrion from the hapless corpse, the son of Oedipus: and therefore the gods no more accept prayer and sacrifice at our hands, or the flame of meat-offering; nor doth any bird give a clear sign by its shrill cry, for they have tasted the fatness of a slain man's blood.

Think, then, on these things, my son. All men are liable to err; but when an error hath been made, that man is no longer witless or unblest who heals the ill into which he hath fallen, and remains not stubborn.

Self-will, we know, incurs the charge of folly. Nay, allow the claim of the dead; stab not the fallen; what prowess is it to slay the slain anew? I have sought thy good, and for thy good I speak: and never is it sweeter to learn from a good counsellor than when he counsels for thine own gain.

CREON

Old man, ye all shoot your shafts at me, as archers at the butts;—ye must needs practise on me with seer-craft also;—aye, the seer-tribe hath long trafficked in me, and made me their merchandise. Gain your gains, drive your trade, if ye list, in the silver-gold of Sardis and the gold of India; but ye shall not hide that man in the grave,—no, though the eagles of Zeus should bear the carrion morsels to their Master's throne—no, not

for dread of that defilement will I suffer his burial:—for well I know that no mortal can defile the gods.—But, aged Teiresias, the wisest fall with a shameful fall, when they clothe shameful thoughts in fair words, for lucre's sake.

TEIRESIAS

Alas! Doth any man know, doth any consider . . .

CREON

Whereof? What general truth dost thou announce?

TEIRESIAS

How precious, above all wealth, is good counsel.

CREON

As folly, I think, is the worst mischief.

TEIRESIAS

Yet thou art tainted with that distemper.

CREON

I would not answer the seer with a taunt.

TEIRESIAS

But thou dost, in saying that I prophesy falsely.

CREON

Well, the prophet-tribe was ever fond of money.

TEIRESIAS

And the race bred of tyrants loves base gain.

CREON

Knowest thou that thy speech is spoken of thy king?

TEIRESIAS

I know it; for through me thou hast saved Thebes.

CREON

Thou art a wise seer; but thou lovest evil deeds.

TEIRESIAS

Thou wilt rouse me to utter the dread secret in my soul.

CREON

Out with it!—Only speak it not for gain.

TEIRESIAS

Indeed, methinks, I shall not,—as touching thee.

CREON

Know that thou shalt not trade on my resolve.

TEIRESIAS

Then know thou—aye, know it well—that thou shalt not live through many more courses of the sun's swift chariot, ere one begotten of thine own loins shall have been given by thee, a corpse for corpses; because thou hast thrust children of the sunlight to the shades, and ruthlessly lodged a living soul in the grave; but keepest in this world one who belongs to the gods infernal, a corpse unburied, unhonoured, all unhallowed. In such thou hast no part, nor have the gods above, but this is a violence done to them by thee. Therefore the avenging destroyers lie in wait for thee, the Furies of Hades and of the gods, that thou mayest be taken in these same ills.

And mark well if I speak these things as a hireling. A time not long to be delayed shall awaken the wailing of men and of women in thy house. And a tumult of hatred against thee stirs all the cities whose mangled sons had the burial-rite from dogs, or from wild beasts, or from some winged bird that bore a polluting breath to each city that contains the hearths of the dead.

Such arrows for thy heart—since thou provokest me—have I launched at thee, archer-like, in my anger,—sure arrows, of which thou shalt not escape the smart.—Boy, lead me home, that he may spend his rage on younger men, and learn to keep a tongue more temperate, and to bear within his breast a better mind than now he bears.

(*The Boy leads* TEIRESIAS *out.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The man hath gone, O King, with dread prophecies. And, since the hair on this head, once dark, hath been white, I know that he hath never been a false prophet to our city.

CREON

I, too, know it well, and am troubled in soul. 'Tis dire to yield; but, by resistance, to smite my pride with ruin—this, too, is a dire choice.

LEADER

Son of Menoeceus, it behoves thee to take wise counsel.

CREON

What should I do, then? Speak, and I will obey.

LEADER

Go thou, and free the maiden from her rocky chamber, and make a tomb for the unburied dead.

CREON

And this is thy counsel? Thou wouldst have me yield?

LEADER

Yea, King, and with all speed; for swift harms from the gods cut short the folly of men.

CREON

Ah me, 'tis hard, but I resign my cherished resolve,—I obey. We must not wage a vain war with destiny.

LEADER

Go, thou, and do these things; leave them not to others.

CREON

Even as I am I'll go:—on, on, my servants, each and all of you,—take axes in your hands, and hasten to the ground that ye see yonder! Since our judgment hath taken this turn, I will be present to unloose her, as I myself bound her. My heart misgives me, 'tis best to keep the established laws, even to life's end.

(CREON *and his servants hasten out on the spectators' left.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O thou of many names, glory of the Cadmeian bride, offspring of loud-thundering Zeus! thou who watchest over famed Italia, and reignest, where all guests are welcomed, in the sheltered plain of Eleusinian Deo! O Bacchus, dweller in Thebe, mother-city of Bacchants, by the softly-gliding stream of Ismenus, on the soil where the fierce dragon's teeth were sown!

antistrophe 1

Thou hast been seen where torch-flames glare through smoke, above the crests of the twin peaks, where move the Corycian nymphs, thy votaries, hard by Castalia's stream.

Thou comest from the ivy-mantled slopes of Nysa's hills, and from the shore green with many-clustered vines, while thy name is lifted up on strains of more than mortal power, as thou visitest the ways of Thebe:

strophe 2

Thebe, of all cities, thou holdest first in honour, thou, and thy mother whom the lightning smote; and now, when all our people is captive to a violent plague, come thou with healing feet over the Parnassian height, or over the moaning strait!

antistrophe 2

O thou with whom the stars rejoice as they move, the stars whose breath is fire; O master of the voices of the night; son begotten of Zeus; appear, O king, with thine attendant Thyiads, who in night-long frenzy dance before thee, the giver of good gifts, Iacchus!

(*Enter* MESSENGER, *on the spectators' left.*)

MESSENGER

Dwellers by the house of Cadmus and of Amphion, there is no estate of mortal life that I would ever praise or blame as settled. Fortune raises and Fortune humbles the lucky or unlucky from day to day, and no one can prophesy to men concerning those things which are established. For Creon was blest once, as I count bliss; he had saved this land of Cadmus from its foes; he was clothed with sole dominion in the land; he reigned, the glorious sire of princely children. And now all hath been lost. For when a man hath forfeited his pleasures, I count him not as living,—I hold him but a breathing corpse. Heap up riches in thy house, if thou wilt; live in kingly state; yet, if there be no gladness therewith, I would not give the shadow of a vapour for all the rest, compared with joy.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And what is this new grief that thou hast to tell for our princes?

MESSENGER

Death; and the living are guilty for the dead.

LEADER

And who is the slayer? Who the stricken? Speak.

MESSENGER

Haemon hath perished; his blood hath been shed by no stranger.

LEADER

By his father's hand, or by his own?

MESSENGER

By his own, in wrath with his sire for the murder.

LEADER

O prophet, how true, then, hast thou proved thy word!

MESSENGER

These things stand thus; ye must consider of the rest.

LEADER

Lo, I see the hapless Eurydice, Creon's wife, approaching; she comes from the house by chance, haply,—or because she knows the tidings of her son.

(*Enter* EURYDICE *from the palace.*)

EURYDICE

People of Thebes, I heard your words as I was going forth, to salute the goddess Pallas with my prayers. Even as I was loosing the fastenings of the gate, to open it, the message of a household woe smote on mine ear: I sank back, terror-stricken, into the arms of my handmaids, and my senses fled. But say again what the tidings were; I shall hear them as one who is no stranger to sorrow.

MESSENGER

Dear lady, I will witness of what I saw, and will leave no word of the truth untold. Why, indeed, should I soothe thee with words in which I must presently be found false? Truth is ever best.—I attended thy lord as his guide to the furthest part of the plain, where the body of Polyneices, torn by dogs, still lay unpitied. We prayed the goddess of the roads, and Pluto, in mercy to restrain their wrath; we washed the dead with holy washing; and with freshly-plucked boughs we solemnly burned such relics as there were. We raised a high mound of his native earth; and then we turned away to enter the maiden's nuptial chamber with rocky couch, the caverned mansion of the bride of Death. And, from afar off, one of us heard a voice of loud wailing at that bride's unhallowed bower; and came to tell our master Creon.

And as the king drew nearer, doubtful sounds of a bitter cry floated around him; he groaned, and said in accents of anguish, 'Wretched that I am, can my foreboding be true? Am I going on the wofullest way that ever I went? My son's voice greets me.—Go, my servants,—haste ye nearer, and when ye have reached the tomb, pass through the gap, where the stones have been wrenched away, to the cell's very mouth,—and look, and see if 'tis Haemon's voice that I know, or if mine ear is cheated by the gods.'

This search, at our despairing master's word, we went to make; and in the furthest part of the tomb we descried *her* hanging by the neck, slung by a thread-wrought halter of fine linen; while *he* was embracing

her with arms thrown around her waist,—bewailing the loss of his bride who is with the dead, and his father's deeds, and his own ill-starred love.

But his father, when he saw him, cried aloud with a dread cry and went in, and called to him with a voice of wailing:—'Unhappy, what a deed hast thou done! What thought hath come to thee? What manner of mischance hath marred thy reason? Come forth, my child! I pray thee —I implore!' But the boy glared at him with fierce eyes, spat in his face, and, without a word of answer, drew his cross-hilted sword:—as his father rushed forth in flight, he missed his aim;—then, hapless one, wroth with himself, he straightway leaned with all his weight against his sword, and drove it, half its length, into his side; and, while sense lingered, he clasped the maiden to his faint embrace, and, as he gasped, sent forth on her pale cheek the swift stream of the oozing blood.

Corpse enfolding corpse he lies; he hath won his nuptial rites, poor youth, not here, yet in the halls of Death; and he hath witnessed to mankind that, of all curses which cleave to man, ill counsel is the sovereign curse.

(EURYDICE *retires into the house.*)

LEADER

What wouldst thou augur from this? The lady hath turned back, and is gone, without a word, good or evil.

MESSENGER

I, too, am startled; yet I nourish the hope that, at these sore tidings of her son, she cannot deign to give her sorrow public vent, but in the privacy of the house will set her handmaids to mourn the household grief. For she is not untaught of discretion, that she should err.

LEADER

I know not; but to me, at least, a strained silence seems to portend peril, no less than vain abundance of lament.

MESSENGER

Well, I will enter the house, and learn whether indeed she is not hiding some repressed purpose in the depths of a passionate heart. Yea, thou sayest well: excess of silence, too, may have a perilous meaning.

(*The* MESSENGER *goes into the palace. Enter* CREON, *on the spectators' left, with attendants, carrying the shrouded body of* HAEMON *on a bier. The following lines between* CREON *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

Lo, yonder the king himself draws near, bearing that which tells too clear a tale,—the work of no stranger's madness,—if we may say it,—but of his own misdeeds.

CREON

strophe 1

Woe for the sins of a darkened soul, stubborn sins, fraught with death! Ah, ye behold us, the sire who hath slain, the son who hath perished! Woe is me, for the wretched blindness of my counsels! Alas, my son, thou hast died in thy youth, by a timeless doom, woe is me!—thy spirit hath fled,—not by thy folly, but by mine own!

CHORUS

strophe 2

Ah me, how all too late thou seemest to see the right!

CREON

Ah me, I have learned the bitter lesson! But then, methinks, oh then, some god smote me from above with crushing weight, and hurled me into ways of cruelty, woe is me,—overthrowing and trampling on my joy! Woe, woe, for the troublous toils of men!

(*Enter* MESSENGER *from the house.*)

MESSENGER

Sire, thou hast come, methinks, as one whose hands are not empty, but who hath store laid up besides; thou bearest yonder burden with thee; and thou art soon to look upon the woes within thy house.

CREON

And what worse ill is yet to follow upon ills?

MESSENGER

Thy queen hath died, true mother of yon corpse—ah, hapless lady!—by blows newly dealt.

CREON

antistrophe 1

Oh Hades, all-receiving, whom no sacrifice can appease! Hast thou, then, no mercy for me? O thou herald of evil, bitter tidings, what word dost thou utter? Alas, I was already as dead, and thou hast smitten me anew! What sayest thou, my son? What is this new message that thou bringest—woe, woe is me!—of a wife's doom,—of slaughter heaped on slaughter?

CHORUS

Thou canst behold: 'tis no longer hidden within.

(*The doors of the palace are opened, and the corpse of* EURYDICE *is disclosed.*)

CREON

antistrophe 2

Ah me,—yonder I behold a new, a second woe! What destiny, ah what, can yet await me? I have but now raised my son in my arms, —and there, again, I see a corpse before me! Alas, alas, unhappy mother! Alas, my child!

MESSENGER

There, at the altar, self-stabbed with a keen knife, she suffered her darkening eyes to close, when she had wailed for the noble fate of Megareus [3] who died before, and then for his fate who lies there,—and when, with her last breath, she had invoked evil fortunes upon thee, the slayer of thy sons.

CREON

strophe 3

Woe, woe! I thrill with dread. Is there none to strike me to the heart with two-edged sword?—O miserable that I am, and steeped in miserable anguish!

MESSENGER

Yea, both this son's doom, and that other's, were laid to thy charge by her whose corpse thou seest.

CREON

And what was the manner of the violent deed by which she passed away?

MESSENGER

Her own hand struck her to the heart, when she had learned her son's sorely lamented fate.

CREON

strophe 4

Ah me, this guilt can never be fixed on any other of mortal kind, for my acquittal! I, even I, was thy slayer, wretched that I am—I own the truth. Lead me away, O my servants, lead me hence with all speed, whose life is but as death!

CHORUS

Thy counsels are good, if there can be good with ills; briefest is best, when trouble is in our path.

CREON

antistrophe 3

Oh, let it come, let it appear, that fairest of fates for me, that brings my last day,—aye, best fate of all! Oh, let it come, that I may never look upon to-morrow's light.

CHORUS

These things are in the future; present tasks claim our care: the ordering of the future rests where it should rest.

CREON

All my desires, at least, were summed in that prayer.

CHORUS

Pray thou no more; for mortals have no escape from destined woe.

CREON

antistrophe 4

Lead me away, I pray you; a rash, foolish man; who have slain thee, ah my son, unwittingly, and thee, too, my wife—unhappy that I am! I know not which way I should bend my gaze, or where I should seek support; for all is amiss with that which is in my hands,—and yonder, again, a crushing fate hath leapt upon my head.

(*As* CREON *is being conducted into the palace, the* LEADER OF THE CHORUS *speaks the closing verses.*)

LEADER

Wisdom is the supreme part of happiness; and reverence towards the gods must be inviolate. Great words of prideful men are ever punished with great blows, and, in old age, teach the chastened to be wise.

1. Antigone is referring to the story of Niobe.

2. Lines 904–920, rendered in this paragraph, are rejected as spurious by Jebb.

3. Megareus, the other son of Creon, was one of the Theban champions who defended a gate of the city, in Aeschylus' *The Seven Against Thebes.* Euripides, in *The Phoenissae* calls him Menoeceus and presents a version of his death.

IV
THE TRACHINIAE

Characters in the Play

Deianeira
Nurse
Hyllus, *son of* Heracles *and* Deianeira
Messenger
Lichas, *the herald of* Heracles
Heracles
An Old Man
Chorus of Trachinian Maidens

INTRODUCTION

THE TRACHINIAE is presumably a later work of Sophocles, but there is no means of determining its exact date. The theory that it is a later composition of the poet rests upon the fact that it bears the unmistakable marks of Euripidean influence. The Chorus is much less integral to the play than is normal in Sophocles. The odes in general serve merely as lyrical interludes between the several episodes of the tragedy. Likewise, there is the motif of the poisoned robe, which naturally calls to mind its use in Euripides' *Medea*. Furthermore, Deianeira's opening speech is almost a perfect example of a conventional Euripidean prologue. Because of these and other reasons, *The Trachiniae* holds a position somewhat apart from Sophocles' other tragedies.

Myths of Heracles were always absorbing to the Greek audience, since hero-cults for his worship were widespread in the ancient world. The particular antecedents of Sophocles' plot in *The Trachiniae,* which derive from the legends of Heracles, begin with the story of his marriage to Deianeira, whom he rescued from the wooing of the river-god, Achelous. After he had taken his bride away, the newly married couple came to a river across which the centaur, Nessus, carried travellers. While Nessus was transporting Deianeira over the river, he attempted to lay violent hands upon her, whereupon Heracles in anger shot him with one of his poisoned arrows. As Nessus was dying he told Deianeira to take some of the blood which was clotted round his wound, and use it as a charm to win back the love of Heracles if ever he should prove unfaithful to her. Later, after Heracles had completed his labours for Eurystheus, he and his family were banished to Trachis because he had treacherously slain a man. Heracles was further punished by Zeus, for he was made to serve a year under Omphale, the queen of Lydia. *The Trachiniae* begins fifteen months after Heracles had departed for Lydia. Deianeira has had no word from her husband.

The play's power and effectiveness lie almost wholly in its portrayal of Deianeira. There are, to be sure, excellent delineations of the subordinate characters, such as Lichas and Hyllus, and several poetic passages of great lyric beauty. However, the closing scenes which present the suf-

ferings of the dying Heracles constitute a serious defect in the play. Despite the stoutest efforts of enthusiastic Sophoclean apologists, Heracles remains a brutal and self-centred character, for whom there can be little sympathy. Sophocles in the latter part of the play seems to have become so preoccupied with presenting Heracles' physical agony that he loses sight of Deianeira, his truly great tragic creation, and the artistic integrity of the whole piece is correspondingly impaired.

THE TRACHINIAE

(SCENE:—*At Trachis, before the house of* HERACLES. *Enter* DEIANEIRA *from the house, accompanied by the* NURSE.)

DEIANEIRA

THERE is a saying among men, put forth of old, that thou canst not rightly judge whether a mortal's lot is good or evil, ere he die. But I, even before I have passed to the world of death, know well that my life is sorrowful and bitter; I, who in the house of my father Oeneus, while yet I dwelt at Pleuron, had such fear of bridals as never vexed any maiden of Aetolia. For my wooer was a river-god, Achelous, who in three shapes was ever asking me from my sire,—coming now as a bull in bodily form, now as a serpent with sheeny coils, now with trunk of man and front of ox, while from a shaggy beard the streams of fountain-water flowed abroad. With the fear of such a suitor before mine eyes, I was always praying in my wretchedness that I might die, or ever I should come near to such a bed.

But at last, to my joy, came the glorious son of Zeus and Alcmena; who closed with him in combat, and delivered me. How the fight was waged, I cannot clearly tell, I know not; if there be any one who watched that sight without terror, such might speak: I, as I sat there, was distraught with dread, lest beauty should bring me sorrow at the last. But finally the Zeus of battles ordained well,—if well indeed it be: for since I have been joined to Heracles as his chosen bride, fear after fear hath haunted me on his account; one night brings a trouble, and the next night, in turn, drives it out. And then children were born to us; whom he has seen only as the husbandman sees his distant field, which he visits at seedtime, and once again at harvest. Such was the life that kept him journeying to and fro, in the service of a certain master.

But now, when he hath risen above those trials,—now it is that my anguish is sorest. Ever since he slew the valiant Iphitus, we have been dwelling here in Trachis, exiles from our home, and the guests of a stranger; but where he is, no one knows; I only know that he is gone, and hath pierced my heart with cruel pangs for him. I am almost sure that some evil hath befallen him; it is no short space that hath passed, but

ten long months, and then five more,—and still no message from him. Yes, there has been some dread mischance;—witness that tablet which he left with me ere he went forth: oft do I pray to the gods that I may not have received it for my sorrow.

NURSE

Deianeira, my mistress, many a time have I marked thy bitter tears and lamentations, as thou bewailedst the going forth of Heracles; but now,—if it be meet to school the free-born with the counsels of a slave, and if I must say what behoves thee,—why, when thou art so rich in sons, dost thou send no one of them to seek thy lord;—Hyllus, before all, who might well go on that errand, if he cared that there should be tidings of his father's welfare? Lo! there he comes, speeding towards the house with timely step; if, then, thou deemest that I speak in season, thou canst use at once my counsel, and the man.

(HYLLUS *comes in from the side.*)

DEIANEIRA

My child, my son, wise words may fall, it seems, from humble lips; this woman is a slave, but hath spoken in the spirit of the free.

HYLLUS

How, mother? Tell me, if it may be told.

DEIANEIRA

It brings thee shame, she saith, that, when thy father hath been so long a stranger, thou hast not sought to learn where he is.

HYLLUS

Nay, I know,—if rumour can be trusted.

DEIANEIRA

And in what region, my child, doth rumour place him?

HYLLUS

Last year, they say, through all the months, he toiled as bondman to a Lydian woman.

DEIANEIRA

If he bore that, then no tidings can surprise.

HYLLUS

Well, he has been delivered from that, as I hear.

DEIANEIRA

Where, then, is he reported to be now,—alive, or dead?

HYLLUS

He is waging or planning a war, they say, upon Euboea, the realm of Eurytus.

DEIANEIRA

Knowest thou, my son, that he hath left with me sure oracles touching that land?

HYLLUS

What are they, mother? I know not whereof thou speakest.

DEIANEIRA

That either he shall meet his death, or, having achieved this task, shall have rest thenceforth, for all his days to come.

So, my child, when his fate is thus trembling in the scale, wilt thou not go to succour him? For we are saved, if he find safety, or we perish with him.

HYLLUS

Ay, I will go, my mother; and, had I known the import of these prophecies, I had been there long since; but, as it was, my father's wonted fortune suffered me not to feel fear for him, or to be anxious overmuch. Now that I have the knowledge, I will spare no pains to learn the whole truth in this matter.

DEIANEIRA

Go, then, my son; be the seeker ne'er so late, he is rewarded if he learn tidings of joy.

(HYLLUS *departs as the* CHORUS OF TRACHINIAN MAIDENS *enters. They are free-born young women of Trachis who are friends and confidantes of* DEIANEIRA. *She remains during their opening choral song.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Thou whom Night brings forth at the moment when she is despoiled of her starry crown, and lays to rest in thy splendour, tell me, I pray thee, O Sun-god, tell me where abides Alcmena's son? Thou glorious lord of flashing light, say, is he threading the straits of the sea, or hath he found an abode on either continent? Speak, thou who seest as none else can see!

antistrophe 1

For Deianeira, as I hear, hath ever an aching heart; she, the battle-prize of old, is now like some bird lorn of its mate; she can never lull her yearning, nor stay her tears; haunted by a sleepless fear for her

absent lord, she pines on her anxious, widowed couch, miserable in her foreboding of mischance.

strophe 2

As one may see billow after billow driven over the wide deep by the tireless south-wind or the north, so the trouble of his life, stormy

as the Cretan sea, now whirls back the son of Cadmus, now lifts him to honour. But some god ever saves him from the house of death, and suffers him not to fail.

antistrophe 2

Lady, I praise not this thy mood; with all reverence will I speak, yet in reproof. Thou dost not well, I say, to kill fair hope by fretting; remember that the son of Cronus himself, the all-disposing king, hath not appointed a painless lot for mortals. Sorrow and joy come round to all, as the Bear moves in his circling paths.

epode

Yea, starry night abides not with men, nor tribulation, nor wealth; in a moment it is gone from us, and another hath his turn of gladness, and of bereavement. So would I wish thee also, the Queen, to keep that prospect ever in thy thoughts; for when hath Zeus been found so careless of his children?

DEIANEIRA

Ye have heard of my trouble, I think, and that hath brought you here; but the anguish which consumes my heart—ye are strangers to that; and never may ye learn it by suffering! Yes, the tender plant grows in those sheltered regions of its own; and the Sun-god's heat vexes it not, nor rain, nor any wind; but it rejoices in its sweet, untroubled being, till such time as the maiden is called a wife, and finds her portion of anxious thoughts in the night, brooding on danger to husband or to children. Such an one could understand the burden of my cares; she could judge them by her own.

Well, I have had many a sorrow to weep for ere now; but I am going to speak of one more grievous than them all.

When Heracles my lord was going from home on his last journey, he left in the house an ancient tablet, inscribed with tokens which he had never brought himself to explain to me before, many as were the ordeals to which he had gone forth. He had always departed as if to conquer, not to die. But now, as if he were a doomed man, he told me what portion of his substance I was to take for my dower, and how he would have his sons share their father's land amongst them. And he fixed the time; say-

ing that, when a year and three months should have passed since he had left the country, then he was fated to die; or, if he should have survived that term, to live thenceforth an untroubled life.

Such, he said, was the doom ordained by the gods to be accomplished in the toils of Heracles; as the ancient oak at Dodona had spoken of yore, by the mouth of the two Peleiades. And this is the precise moment when the fulfilment of that word becomes due; so that I start up from sweet slumber, my friends, stricken with terror at the thought that I must remain widowed of the noblest among men.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hush—no more ill-omened words; I see a man approaching, who wears a wreath, as if for joyous tidings.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Queen Deianeira, I shall be the first of messengers to free thee from fear. Know that Alcmena's son lives and triumphs, and from battle brings the first-fruits to the gods of this land.

DEIANEIRA

What news is this, old man, that thou hast told me?

MESSENGER

That thy lord, admired of all, will soon come to thy house, restored to thee in his victorious might.

DEIANEIRA

What citizen or stranger hath told thee this?

MESSENGER

In the meadow, summer haunt of oxen, Lichas the herald is proclaiming it to many: from him I heard it, and flew hither, that I might be the first to give thee these tidings, and so might reap some guerdon from thee, and win thy grace.

DEIANEIRA

And why is *he* not here, if he brings good news?

MESSENGER

His task, lady, is no easy one; all the Malian folk have thronged around him with questions, and he cannot move forward: each and all are bent on learning what they desire, and will not release him until they are satisfied. Thus their eagerness detains him against his will; but thou shalt presently see him face to face.

DEIANEIRA

O Zeus, who rulest the meads of Oeta, sacred from the scythe, at last, though late, thou hast given us joy! Uplift your voices, ye women within the house and ye beyond our gates, since now we are gladdened by the light of this message, that hath risen on us beyond my hope!

LEADER OF ONE SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Let the maidens raise a joyous strain for the house, with songs of triumph at the hearth; and, amidst them, let the shout of the men go up with one accord for Apollo of the bright quiver, our Defender! And at the same time, ye maidens, lift up a paean, cry aloud to his sister, the Ortygian Artemis, smiter of deer, goddess of the twofold torch, and to the Nymphs her neighbours!

LEADER OF OTHER SEMI-CHORUS

My spirit soars; I will not reject the wooing of the flute.—O thou sovereign of my soul! Lo, the ivy's spell begins to work upon me! Euoe!—even now it moves me to whirl in the swift dance of Bachanals!

CHORUS

Praise, praise unto the Healer!

LEADER OF WHOLE CHORUS

See, dear lady, see! Behold, these tidings are taking shape before thy gaze.

DEIANEIRA

I see it, dear maidens; my watching eyes had not failed to note yon company. (*Enter* LICHAS, *followed by Captive Maidens. Conspicuous among them is* IOLE.)—All hail to the herald, whose coming hath been so long delayed!—if indeed thou bringest aught that can give joy.

LICHAS

We are happy in our return, and happy in thy greeting, lady, which befits the deed achieved; for when a man hath fair fortune, he needs must win good welcome.

DEIANEIRA

O best of friends, tell me first what first I would know,—shall I receive Heracles alive?

LICHAS

I, certainly, left him alive and well,—in vigorous health, unburdened by disease.

DEIANEIRA

Where, tell me—at home, or on foreign soil?

LICHAS

There is a headland of Euboea, where to Cenaean Zeus he consecrates altars, and the tribute of fruitful ground.

DEIANEIRA

In payment of a vow, or at the bidding of an oracle?

LICHAS

For a vow, made when he was seeking to conquer and despoil the country of these women who are before thee.

DEIANEIRA

And these—who are they, I pray thee, and whose daughters? They deserve pity, unless their plight deceives me.

LICHAS

These are captives whom he chose out for himself and for the gods, when he sacked the city of Eurytus.

DEIANEIRA

Was it the war against that city which kept him away so long, beyond all forecast, past all count of days?

LICHAS

Not so: the greater part of the time he was detained in Lydia,—no free man, as he declares, but sold into bondage. No offence should attend on the word, lady, when the deed is found to be of Zeus. So he passed a whole year, as he himself avows, in thraldom to Omphale the barbarian. And so stung was he by that reproach, he bound himself by a solemn oath that he would one day enslave, with wife and child, the man who had brought that calamity upon him. Nor did he speak the word in vain; but, when he had been purged, gathered an alien host, and went against the city of Eurytus. That man, he said, alone of mortals, had a share in causing his misfortune. For when Heracles, an old friend, came to his house and hearth, Eurytus heaped on him the taunts of a bitter tongue and spiteful soul,—saying, 'Thou hast unerring arrows in thy hands, and yet my sons surpass thee in the trial of archery'; 'Thou art a slave,' he cried, 'a free man's broken thrall': and at a banquet, when his guest was full of wine, he thrust him from his doors.

Wroth thereat, when afterward Iphitus came to the hill of Tiryns, in search for horses that had strayed, Heracles seized a moment when the man's wandering thoughts went not with his wandering gaze, and hurled

him from a tower-like summit. But in anger at that deed, Zeus our lord, Olympian sire of all, sent him forth into bondage, and spared not, because, this once, he had taken a life by guile. Had he wreaked his vengeance openly, Zeus would surely have pardoned him the righteous triumph; for the gods, too, love not insolence.

So those men, who waxed so proud with bitter speech, are themselves in the mansions of the dead, all of them, and their city is enslaved; while the women whom thou beholdest, fallen from happiness to misery, come here to thee; for such was thy lord's command, which I, his faithful servant, perform. He himself, thou mayest be sure,—so soon as he shall have offered holy sacrifice for his victory to Zeus from whom he sprang,—will be with thee. After all the fair tidings that have been told, this, indeed, is the sweetest word to hear.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Now, O Queen, thy joy is assured; part is with thee, and thou hast promise of the rest.

DEIANEIRA

Yea, have I not the fullest reason to rejoice at these tidings of my lord's happy fortune? To such fortune, such joy must needs respond. And yet a prudent mind can see room for misgiving lest he who prospers should one day suffer reverse. A strange pity hath come over me, friends, at the sight of these ill-fated exiles, homeless and fatherless in a foreign land; once the daughters, perchance, of free-born sires, but now doomed to the life of slaves. O Zeus, who turnest the tide of battle, never may I see child of mine thus visited by thy hand; nay, if such visitation is to be, may it not fall while Deianeira lives! Such dread do I feel, beholding these.

(*To* IOLE) Ah, hapless girl, say, who art thou? A maiden, or a mother? To judge by thine aspect, an innocent maiden, and of a noble race. Lichas, whose daughter is this stranger? Who is her mother, who her sire? Speak, I pity her more than all the rest, when I behold her; as she alone shows a due feeling for her plight.

LICHAS

How should I know? Why should'st thou ask me? Perchance the offspring of not the meanest in yonder land.

DEIANEIRA

Can she be of royal race? Had Eurytus a daughter?

LICHAS

I know not; indeed, I asked not many questions.

DEIANEIRA

And thou hast not heard her name from any of her companions?

LICHAS

No, indeed, I went through my task in silence.

DEIANEIRA

Unhappy girl, let me, at least, hear it from thine own mouth. It is indeed distressing not to know *thy* name.

(IOLE *maintains her silence.*)

LICHAS

It will be unlike her former behaviour, then, I can tell thee, if she opens her lips: for she hath not uttered one word, but hath ever been travailing with the burden of her sorrow, and weeping bitterly, poor girl, since she left her wind-swept home. Such a state is grievous for herself, but claims our forbearance.

DEIANEIRA

Then let her be left in peace, and pass under our roof as she wishes; her present woes must not be crowned with fresh pains at my hands; she hath enough already.—Now let us all go in, that thou mayest start speedily on thy journey, while I make all things ready in the house.

(LICHAS *leads the captives into the house.* DEIANEIRA *starts to follow them, but the* MESSENGER, *who has been present during the entire scene, detains her. He speaks as he moves nearer to her.*)

MESSENGER

Ay, but first tarry here a brief space, that thou mayest learn, apart from yonder folk, whom thou art taking to thy hearth, and mayest gain the needful knowledge of things which have not been told to thee. Of these I am in full possession.

DEIANEIRA

What means this? Why wouldest thou stay my departure?

MESSENGER

Pause and listen. My former story was worth thy hearing, and so will this one be, methinks.

DEIANEIRA

Shall I call those others back? Or wilt thou speak before me and these maidens?

MESSENGER

To thee and these I can speak freely; never mind the others.

DEIANEIRA

Well, they are gone;—so thy story can proceed.

MESSENGER

Yonder man was not speaking the straight-forward truth in aught that he has just told. He has given false tidings now, or else his former report was dishonest.

DEIANEIRA

How sayest thou? Explain thy whole drift clearly; thus far, thy words are riddles to me.

MESSENGER

I heard this man declare, before many witnesses, that for this maiden's sake Heracles overthrew Eurytus and the proud towers of Oechalia; Love, alone of the gods, wrought on him to do those deeds of arms,—not the toilsome servitude to Omphale in Lydia, nor the death to which Iphitus was hurled. But now the herald has thrust Love out of sight, and tells a different tale.

Well, when he could not persuade her sire to give him the maiden for his paramour, he devised some petty complaint as a pretext, and made war upon her land,—that in which, as he said, this Eurytus bore sway,—and slew the prince her father, and sacked her city. And now, as thou seest, he comes sending her to this house not in careless fashion, lady, nor like a slave;—no, dream not of that,—it is not likely, if his heart is kindled with desire.

I resolved, therefore, O Queen, to tell thee all that I had heard from yonder man. Many others were listening to it, as I was, in the public place where the Trachinians were assembled; and they can convict him. If my words are unwelcome, I am grieved; but nevertheless I have spoken out the truth.

DEIANEIRA

Ah me unhappy! In what plight do I stand? What secret bane have I received beneath my roof? Hapless that I am! Is she nameless, then, as her convoy sware?

MESSENGER

Nay, illustrious by name as by birth; she is the daughter of Eurytus, and was once called Iole; she of whose parentage Lichas could say nothing, because, forsooth, he asked no questions.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Accursed, above other evil-doers, be the man whom deeds of treachery dishonour!

DEIANEIRA

Ah, maidens, what am I to do? These latest tidings have bewildered me!

LEADER

Go and inquire from Lichas; perchance he will tell the truth, if thou constrain him to answer.

DEIANEIRA

Well, I will go; thy counsel is not amiss.

MESSENGER

And I, shall I wait here? Or what is thy pleasure?

DEIANEIRA

Remain;—here he comes from the house of his own accord, without summons from me.

(*Enter* LICHAS)

LICHAS

Lady, what message shall I bear to Heracles? Give me thy commands, for, as thou seest, I am going.

DEIANEIRA

How hastily thou art rushing away, when thy visit had been so long delayed,—before we have had time for further talk.

LICHAS

Nay, if there be aught that thou would'st ask, I am at thy service.

DEIANEIRA

Wilt thou indeed give me the honest truth?

LICHAS

Yes, be great Zeus my witness,—in anything that I know.

DEIANEIRA

Who is the woman, then, whom thou hast brought?

LICHAS

She is Euboean; but of what birth, I cannot say.

MESSENGER

Sirrah, look at me:—to whom art thou speaking, think'st thou?

LICHAS

And thou—what dost thou mean by such a question?

MESSENGER

Deign to answer me, if thou comprehendest.

LICHAS

To the royal Deianeira, unless mine eyes deceive me,—daughter of Oeneus, wife of Heracles, and my queen.

MESSENGER

The very word that I wished to hear from thee:—thou sayest that she is thy queen?

LICHAS

Yes, as in duty bound.

MESSENGER

Well, then, what art thou prepared to suffer, if found guilty of failing in that duty?

LICHAS

Failing in duty? What dark saying is this?

MESSENGER

'Tis none; the darkest words are thine own.

LICHAS

I will go,—I was foolish to hear thee so long.

MESSENGER

No, not till thou hast answered a brief question.

LICHAS

Ask what thou wilt; thou art not taciturn.

MESSENGER

That captive, whom thou hast brought home—thou knowest whom I mean?

LICHAS

Yes; but why dost thou ask?

MESSENGER

Well, saidst thou not that thy prisoner—she, on whom thy gaze now turns so vacantly—was Iole, daughter of Eurytus?

LICHAS

Said it to whom? Who and where is the man that will be thy witness to hearing this from me?

MESSENGER

To many of our own folk thou saidst it: in the public gathering of Trachinians, a great crowd heard thus much from thee.

LICHAS

Ay—said they heard; but 'tis one thing to report a fancy, and another to make the story good.

MESSENGER

A fancy! Didst thou not say on thine oath that thou wast bringing her as a bride for Heracles?

LICHAS

I? bringing a bride?—In the name of the gods, dear mistress, tell me who this stranger may be?

MESSENGER

One who heard from thine own lips that the conquest of the whole city was due to love for this girl: the Lydian woman was not its destroyer, but the passion which this maid has kindled.

LICHAS

Lady, let this fellow withdraw: to prate with the brainsick befits not a sane man.

DEIANEIRA

Nay, I implore thee by Zeus whose lightnings go forth over the high glens of Oeta, do not cheat me of the truth! For she to whom thou wilt speak is not ungenerous, nor hath she yet to learn that the human heart is inconstant to its joys. They are not wise, then, who stand forth to buffet against Love; for Love rules the gods as he will, and me; and why not another woman, such as I am? So I am mad indeed, if I blame my husband, because that distemper hath seized him; or this woman, his partner in a thing which is no shame to them, and no wrong to me. Impossible! No; if he taught thee to speak falsely, 'tis not a noble lesson that thou art learning; or if thou art thine own teacher in this, thou wilt be found cruel when it is thy wish to prove kind. Nay, tell me the whole truth. To a free-born man, the name of liar cleaves as a deadly brand. If thy hope is to escape detection, that, too, is vain; there are many to whom thou hast spoken, who will tell me.

And if thou art afraid, thy fear is mistaken. *Not* to learn the truth,—that, indeed, would pain me; but to know it—what is there terrible in that? Hath not Heracles wedded others ere now,—ay, more than living man,—and no one of them hath had harsh word or taunt from me; nor shall this girl, though her whole being should be absorbed in her passion;

for indeed I felt a profound pity when I beheld her, because her beauty hath wrecked her life, and she, hapless one, all innocent, hath brought her fatherland to ruin and to bondage.

Well, those things must go with wind and stream.—To thee I say,—deceive whom thou wilt, but ever speak the truth to me.

LEADER

Hearken to her good counsel, and hereafter thou shalt have no cause to complain of this lady; our thanks, too, will be thine.

LICHAS

Nay, then, dear mistress,—since I see that thou thinkest as mortals should think, and canst allow for weakness,—I will tell thee the whole truth, and hide it not. Yes, it is even as yon man saith. This girl inspired that overmastering love which long ago smote through the soul of Heracles; for this girl's sake the desolate Oechalia, her home, was made the prey of his spear. And he,—it is just to him to say so,—never denied this, —never told me to conceal it. But I, lady, fearing to wound thy heart by such tidings, have sinned, if thou count this in any sort a sin.

Now, however, that thou knowest the whole story, for both your sakes, —for his, and not less for thine own,—bear with the woman, and be content that the words which thou hast spoken regarding her should bind thee still. For he, whose strength is victorious in all else, hath been utterly vanquished by his passion for this girl.

DEIANEIRA

Indeed, mine own thoughts move me to act thus. Trust me, I will not add a new affliction to my burdens by waging a fruitless fight against the gods.

But let us go into the house, that thou mayest receive my messages; and, since gifts should be meetly recompensed with gifts,—that thou mayest take these also. It is not right that thou shouldest go back with empty hands, after coming with such a goodly train.

(*Exit* MESSENGER, *as* LICHAS *and* DEIANEIRA *go into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Great and mighty is the victory which the Cyprian queen ever bears away. I stay not now to speak of the gods; I spare to tell how she beguiled the son of Cronus, and Hades, the lord of darkness, or Poseidon, shaker of the earth.

But, when this bride was to be won, who were the valiant rivals that entered the contest for her hand? Who went forth to the ordeal of battle, to the fierce blows and the blinding dust?

antistrophe

One was a mighty river-god, the dread form of a horned and four-legged bull, Acheloüs, from Oeniadae: the other came from Thebe, dear to Bacchus, with curved bow, and spears, and brandished club, the son of Zeus: who then met in combat, fain to win a bride: and the Cyprian goddess of nuptial joy was there with them, sole umpire of their strife.

epode

Then was there clatter of fists and clang of bow, and the noise of a bull's horns therewith; then were there close-locked grapplings, and deadly blows from the forehead, and loud deep cries from both.

Meanwhile, she, in her delicate beauty, sat on the side of a hill that could be seen afar, awaiting the husband that should be hers.

So the battle rages, as I have told; but the fair bride who is the prize of the strife abides the end in piteous anguish. And suddenly she is parted from her mother, as when a heifer is taken from its dam.

(DEIANEIRA *enters from the house alone, carrying in her arms a casket containing a robe.*)

DEIANEIRA

Dear friends, while our visitor is saying his farewell to the captive girls in the house, I have stolen forth to you,—partly to tell you what these hands have devised, and partly to crave your sympathy with my sorrow.

A maiden,—or, methinks, no longer a maiden, but a mistress,—hath found her way into my house, as a freight comes to a mariner,—a merchandise to make shipwreck of my peace. And now we twain are to share the same marriage-bed, the same embrace. Such is the reward that Heracles hath sent me,—he whom I called true and loyal,—for guarding his home through all that weary time. I have no thought of anger against him, often as he is vexed with this distemper. But then to live with her, sharing the same union—what woman could endure it? For I see that the flower of her age is blossoming, while mine is fading; and the eyes of men love to cull the bloom of youth, but they turn aside from the old. This, then, is my fear,—lest Heracles, in name my spouse, should be the younger's mate.

But, as I said, anger ill beseems a woman of understanding. I will tell you, friends, the way by which I hope to find deliverance and relief. I had a gift, given to me long ago by a monster of olden time, and stored in an urn of bronze; a gift which, while yet a girl, I took up from the shaggy-breasted Nessus,—from his life-blood, as he lay dying; Nessus, who used

to carry men in his arms for hire across the deep waters of the Evenus, using no oar to waft them, nor sail of ship.

I, too, was carried on his shoulders,—when, by my father's sending, I first went forth with Heracles as his wife; and when I was in mid-stream, he touched me with wanton hands. I shrieked; the son of Zeus turned quickly round, and shot a feathered arrow; it whizzed through his breast to the lungs; and, in his mortal faintness, thus much the Centaur spake:—

'Child of aged Oeneus, thou shalt have at least this profit of my ferrying,—if thou wilt hearken,—because thou wast the last whom I conveyed. If thou gatherest with thy hands the blood clotted round my wound, at the place where the Hydra, Lerna's monstrous growth, hath tinged the arrow with black gall,—this shall be to thee a charm for the soul of Heracles, so that he shall never look upon any woman to love her more than thee.'

I bethought me of this, my friends—for, after his death, I had kept it carefully locked up in a secret place; and I have anointed this robe, doing everything to it as he enjoined while he lived. The work is finished. May deeds of wicked daring be ever far from my thoughts, and from my knowledge,—as I abhor the women who attempt them! But if in any wise I may prevail against this girl by love-spells and charms used on Heracles, the means to that end are ready;—unless, indeed, I seem to be acting rashly: if so, I will desist forthwith.

LEADER

Nay, if these measures give any ground of confidence, we think that thy design is not amiss.

DEIANEIRA

Well, the ground stands thus,—there is a fair promise; but I have not yet essayed the proof.

LEADER

Nay, knowledge must come through action; thou canst have no test which is not fanciful, save by trial.

DEIANEIRA

Well, we shall know presently:—for there I see the man already at the doors; and he will soon be going.—Only may my secret be well kept by you! While thy deeds are hidden, even though they be not seemly, thou wilt never be brought to shame.

(LICHAS *enters from the house.*)

LICHAS

What are thy commands? Give me my charge, daughter of Oeneus; for already I have tarried over long.

DEIANEIRA

Indeed, I have just been seeing to this for thee, Lichas, while thou wast speaking to the stranger maidens in the house;—that thou shouldest take for me this long robe, woven by mine own hand, a gift to mine absent lord.

And when thou givest it, charge him that he, and no other, shall be the first to wear it; that it shall not be seen by the light of the sun, nor by the sacred precinct, nor by the fire at the hearth, until he stand forth, conspicuous before all eyes, and show it to the gods on a day when bulls are slain.

For thus had I vowed,—that if I should ever see or hear that he had come safely home, I would duly clothe him in this robe, and so present him to the gods, newly radiant at their altar in new garb.

As proof, thou shalt carry a token, which he will quickly recognise within the circle of this seal.

Now go thy way; and, first, remember the rule that messengers should not be meddlers; next, so bear thee that my thanks may be joined to his, doubling the grace which thou shalt win.

LICHAS

Nay, if I ply this herald-craft of Hermes with any sureness, I will never trip in doing thine errand: I will not fail to deliver this casket as it is, and to add thy words in attestation of thy gift.

DEIANEIRA

Thou mayest be going now; for thou knowest well how things are with us in the house.

LICHAS

I know, and will report, that all hath prospered.

DEIANEIRA

And then thou hast seen the greeting given to the stranger maiden—thou knowest how I welcomed her?

LICHAS

So that my heart was filled with wondering joy.

DEIANEIRA

What more, then, is there for thee to tell? I am afraid that it would be too soon to speak of the longing on my part, before we know if I am longed for there.

(LICHAS *departs with the casket and* DEIANEIRA *retires into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O ye who dwell by the warm springs between haven and crag, and by Oeta's heights; O dwellers by the land-locked waters of the Malian sea, on the shore sacred to the virgin-goddess of the golden shafts, where the Greeks meet in famous council at the Gates;

antistrophe 1

Soon shall the glorious voice of the flute go up for you again, resounding with no harsh strain of grief, but with such music as the lyre maketh to the gods! For the son whom Alcmena bore to Zeus is hastening homeward, with the trophies of all prowess.

strophe 2

He was lost utterly to our land, a wanderer over sea, while we waited through twelve long months, and knew nothing; and his loving wife, sad dweller with sad thoughts, was ever pining amid her tears. But now the War-god, roused to fury, hath delivered her from the days of her mourning.

antistrophe 2

May he come, may he come! Pause not the many-oared ship that carries him, till he shall have reached this town, leaving the island altar where, as rumour saith, he is sacrificing! Thence may he come, full of desire, steeped in love by the specious device of the robe, on which Persuasion hath spread her sovereign charm!

(DEIANEIRA *comes out of the house in agitation.*)

DEIANEIRA

Friends, how I fear that I may have gone too far in all that I have been doing just now!

LEADER

What hath happened, Deianeira, daughter of Oeneus?

DEIANEIRA

I know not; but feel a misgiving that I shall presently be found to have wrought a great mischief, the issue of a fair hope.

LEADER

It is nothing, surely, that concerns thy gift to Heracles?

DEIANEIRA

Yea, even so. And henceforth I would say to all, act not with zeal, if ye act without light.

LEADER

Tell us the cause of thy fear, if it may be told.

DEIANEIRA

A thing hath come to pass, my friends, such that, if I declare it, ye will hear a marvel whereof none could have dreamed.

That with which I was lately anointing the festal robe,—a white tuft of fleecy sheep's wool,—hath disappeared,—not consumed by anything in the house, but self-devoured and self-destroyed, as it crumbled down from the surface of a stone. But I must tell the story more at length, that thou mayest know exactly how this thing befell.

I neglected no part of the precepts which the savage Centaur gave me, when the bitter barb was rankling in his side: they were in my memory, like the graven words which no hand may wash from a tablet of bronze. Now these were his orders, and I obeyed them:—to keep this unguent in a secret place, always remote from fire and from the sun's warm ray, until I should apply it, newly spread, where I wished. So had I done. And now, when the moment for action had come, I performed the anointing privily in the house, with a tuft of soft wool which I had plucked from a sheep of our home-flock; then I folded up my gift, and laid it, unvisited by sunlight, within its casket, as ye saw.

But as I was going back into the house, I beheld a thing too wondrous for words, and passing the wit of man to understand. I happened to have thrown the shred of wool, with which I had been preparing the robe, into the full blaze of the sunshine. As it grew warm, it shrivelled all away, and quickly crumbled to powder on the ground, like nothing so much as the dust shed from a saw's teeth where men work timber. In such a state it lies as it fell. And from the earth, where it was strewn, clots of foam seethed up, as when the rich juice of the blue fruit from the vine of Bacchus is poured upon the ground.

So I know not, hapless one, whither to turn my thoughts; I only see that I have done a fearful deed. Why or wherefore should the monster, in his death-throes, have shown good will to me, on whose account he was dying? Impossible! No, he was cajoling me, in order to slay the man who had smitten him: and I gain the knowledge of this too late, when it avails no more. Yes, I alone—unless my foreboding prove false—I, wretched one, must destroy him! For I know that the arrow which made the wound did scathe even to the god Cheiron; and it kills all beasts that it touches. And since 'tis this same black venom in the blood that hath passed out

through the wound of Nessus, must it not kill my lord also? I ween it must.

Howbeit, I am resolved that, if he is to fall, at the same time I also shall be swept from life; for no woman could bear to live with an evil name, if she rejoices that her nature is not evil.

LEADER

Mischief must needs be feared; but it is not well to doom our hope before the event.

DEIANEIRA

Unwise counsels leave no room even for a hope which can lend courage.

LEADER

Yet towards those who have erred unwittingly, men's anger is softened; and so it should be towards thee.

DEIANEIRA

Nay, such words are not for one who has borne a part in the ill deed, but only for him who has no trouble at his own door.

LEADER

'Twere well to refrain from further speech, unless thou would'st tell aught to thine own son; for he is at hand, who went erewhile to seek his sire.

(*Enter* HYLLUS)

HYLLUS

O mother, would that one of three things had befallen thee! Would that thou wert dead,—or, if living, no mother of mine,—or that some new and better spirit had passed into thy bosom.

DEIANEIRA

Ah, my son, what cause have I given thee to abhor me?

HYLLUS

I tell thee that thy husband—yea, my sire—hath been done to death by thee this day!

DEIANEIRA

Oh, what word hath passed thy lips, my child!

HYLLUS

A word that shall not fail of fulfilment; for who may undo that which hath come to pass?

DEIANEIRA

What saidst thou, my son? Who is thy warranty for charging me with a deed so terrible?

HYLLUS

I have seen my father's grievous fate with mine own eyes; I speak not from hearsay.

DEIANEIRA

And where didst thou find him,—where didst thou stand at his side?

HYLLUS

If thou art to hear it, then must all be told.

After sacking the famous town of Eurytus, he went his way with the trophies and first-fruits of victory. There is a sea-washed headland of Euboea, Cape Cenaeum, where he dedicated altars and a sacred grove to the Zeus of his fathers; and there I first heheld him, with the joy of yearning love.

He was about to celebrate a great sacrifice, when his own herald, Lichas, came to him from home, bearing thy gift, the deadly robe; which he put on, according to thy precept; and then began his offering with twelve bulls, free from blemish, the firstlings of the spoil; but altogether he brought a hundred victims, great or small, to the altar.

At first, hapless one, he prayed with serene soul, rejoicing in his comely garb. But when the blood-fed flame began to blaze from the holy offerings and from the resinous pine, a sweat broke forth upon his flesh, and the tunic clung to his sides, at every joint, close-glued, as if by a craftsman's hand; there came a biting pain that racked his bones; and then the venom, as of some deadly, cruel viper, began to devour him.

Thereupon he shouted for the unhappy Lichas,—in no wise to blame for thy crime,—asking what treason had moved him to bring that robe; but he, all-unknowing, hapless one, said that he had brought the gift from thee alone, as it had been sent. When his master heard it, as a piercing spasm clutched his lungs, he caught him by the foot, where the ankle turns in the socket, and hurled him at a surf-beaten rock in the sea; and he made the white brain to ooze from the hair, as the skull was dashed to splinters, and blood scattered therewith.

But all the people lifted up a cry of awe-struck grief, seeing that one was frenzied, and the other slain; and no one dared to come before the man. For the pain dragged him to earth, or made him leap into the air, with yells and shrieks, till the cliffs rang around, steep headlands of Locris, and Euboean capes.

But when he was spent with oft throwing himself on the ground in his anguish, and oft making loud lament,—cursing his fatal marriage with

thee, the vile one, and his alliance with Oeneus,—saying how he had found in it the ruin of his life,—then, from out of the shrouding altar-smoke, he lifted up his wildly-rolling eyes, and saw me in the great crowd, weeping. He turned his gaze on me, and called me: 'O son, draw near; do not fly from my trouble, even though thou must share my death. Come, bear me forth, and set me, if thou canst, in a place where no man shall see me; or, if thy pity forbids that, at least convey me with all speed out of this land, and let me not die where I am.'

That command sufficed; we laid him in mid-ship, and brought him—but hardly brought him—to this shore, moaning in his torments. And ye shall presently behold him, alive, or lately dead.

Such, mother, are the designs and deeds against my sire whereof thou hast been found guilty. May avenging Justice and the Erinys visit thee for them! Yes, if it be right, that is my prayer: and right it is,—for I have seen thee trample on the right, by slaying the noblest man in all the world, whose like thou shalt see nevermore!

(DEIANEIRA *moves towards the house.*)

LEADER (*to* DEIANEIRA)

Why dost thou depart in silence? Knowest thou not that such silence pleads for thine accuser?

(DEIANEIRA *goes in the house.*)

HYLLUS

Let her depart. A fair wind speed her far from my sight! Why should the name of mother bring her a semblance of respect, when she is all unlike a mother in her deeds? No, let her go,—farewell to her; and may such joy as she gives my sire become her own!

(*Exit* HYLLUS, *into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

See, maidens, how suddenly the divine word of the old prophecy hath come upon us, which said that, when the twelfth year should have run through its full tale of months, it should end the series of toils for the true-born son of Zeus! And that promise is wafted surely to its fulfilment. For how shall he who beholds not the light have toilsome servitude any more beyond the grave?

antistrophe 1

If a cloud of death is around him, and the doom wrought by the Centaur's craft is stinging his sides, where cleaves the venom which Thanatos begat and the gleaming serpent nourished, how can he look upon to-morrow's sun,—when that appalling Hydra-shape holds him

in its grip, and those murderous goads, prepared by the wily words of black-haired Nessus, have started into fury, vexing him with tumultuous pain?

strophe 2

Of such things this hapless lady had no foreboding; but she saw a great mischief swiftly coming on her home from the new marriage. Her own hand applied the remedy; but for the issues of a stranger's counsel, given at a fatal meeting,—for these, I ween, she makes despairing lament, shedding the tender dew of plenteous tears. And the coming fate foreshadows a great misfortune, contrived by guile.

antistrophe 2

Our streaming tears break forth: alas, a plague is upon him more piteous than any suffering that foemen ever brought upon that glorious hero.

Ah, thou dark steel of the spear foremost in battle, by whose might yonder bride was lately borne so swiftly from Oechalia's heights! But the Cyprian goddess, ministering in silence, hath been plainly proved the doer of these deeds.

LEADER OF ONE SEMI-CHORUS

Is it fancy, or do I hear some cry of grief just passing through the house? What is this?

LEADER OF OTHER SEMI-CHORUS

No uncertain sound, but a wail of anguish from within: the house hath some new trouble.

LEADER OF WHOLE CHORUS

And mark how sadly, with what a cloud upon her brow, that aged woman approaches, to give us tidings.

(*Enter* NURSE, *from the house.*)

NURSE

Ah, my daughters, great, indeed, were the sorrows that we were to reap from the gift sent to Heracles!

LEADER

Aged woman, what new mischance hast thou to tell?

NURSE

Deianeira hath departed on the last of all her journeys, departed without stirring foot.

LEADER

Thou speakest not of death?

NURSE

My tale is told.

LEADER

Dead, hapless one?

NURSE

Again thou hearest it.

CHORUS

Hapless, lost one! Say, what was the manner of her death?

NURSE

Oh, a cruel deed was there!

CHORUS

Speak, woman, how hath she met her doom?

NURSE

By her own hand hath she died.

CHORUS

What fury, what pangs of frenzy have cut her off by the edge of a dire weapon? How contrived she this death, following death,—all wrought by her alone?

NURSE

By the stroke of the sword that makes sorrow.

CHORUS

Sawest thou that violent deed, poor helpless one?

NURSE

I saw it; yea, I was standing near.

CHORUS

Whence came it? How was it done? Oh, speak!

NURSE

'Twas the work of her own mind and her own hand.

CHORUS

What dost thou tell us?

NURSE

The sure truth.

CHORUS

The first-born, the first-born of that new bride is a dread Erinys for this house!

NURSE

Too true; and, hadst thou been an eye-witness of the action, verily thy pity would have been yet deeper.

LEADER

And could a woman's hand dare to do such deeds?

NURSE

Yea, with dread daring; thou shalt hear, and then thou wilt bear me witness.

When she came alone into the house, and saw her son preparing a deep litter in the court, that he might go back with it to meet his sire, then she hid herself where none might see; and, falling before the altars, she wailed aloud that they were left desolate; and, when she touched any household thing that she had been wont to use, poor lady, in the past, her tears would flow; or when, roaming hither and thither through the house, she beheld the form of any well-loved servant, she wept, hapless one, at that sight, crying aloud upon her own fate, and that of the household which would thenceforth be in the power of others.

But when she ceased from this, suddenly I beheld her rush into the chamber of Heracles. From a secret place of espial, I watched her; and saw her spreading coverings on the couch of her lord. When she had done this, she sprang thereon, and sat in the middle of the bed; her tears burst forth in burning streams, and thus she spake: 'Ah, bridal bed and bridal chamber mine, farewell now and for ever; never more shall ye receive me to rest upon this couch.' She said no more, but with a vehement hand loosed her robe, where the gold-wrought brooch lay above her breast, baring all her left side and arm. Then I ran with all my strength, and warned her son of her intent. But lo, in the space between my going and our return, she had driven a two-edged sword through her side to the heart.

At that sight, her son uttered a great cry; for he knew, alas, that in his anger he had driven her to that deed; and he had learned, too late, from the servants in the house that she had acted without knowledge, by the prompting of the Centaur. And now the youth, in his misery, bewailed her with all passionate lament; he knelt, and showered kisses on her lips; he threw himself at her side upon the ground, bitterly crying that he had rashly smitten her with a slander,—weeping, that he must now live bereaved of both alike,—of mother and of sire.

Such are the fortunes of this house. Rash indeed, is he who reckons on

the morrow, or haply on days beyond it; for to-morrow is not, until to-day is safely past.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Which woe shall I bewail first, which misery is the greater? Alas, 'tis hard for me to tell.

antistrophe 1

One sorrow may be seen in the house: for one we wait with foreboding: and suspense hath a kinship with pain.

strophe 2

Oh that some strong breeze might come with wafting power unto our hearth, to bear me far from this land, lest I die of terror, when I look but once upon the mighty son of Zeus!

For they say that he is approaching the house in torments from which there is no deliverance, a wonder of unutterable woe.

antistrophe 2

Ah, it was not far off, but close to us, that woe of which my lament gave warning, like the nightingale's piercing note!

Men of an alien race are coming yonder. And how, then, are they bringing him? In sorrow, as for some loved one, they move on their mournful, noiseless march.

Alas, he is brought in silence! What are we to think; that he is dead, or sleeping?

(*Enter* HYLLUS *and an* OLD MAN, *with attendants, bearing* HERACLES *upon a litter.*)

HYLLUS

Woe is me for thee, my father, woe is me for thee, wretched that I am! Whither shall I turn? What can I do? Ah me!

OLD MAN (*whispering*)

Hush, my son! Rouse not the cruel pain that infuriates thy sire! He lives, though prostrated. Oh, put a stern restraint upon thy lips!

HYLLUS

How sayest thou, old man—is he alive?

OLD MAN (*whispering*)

Thou must not awake the slumberer! Thou must not rouse and revive the dread frenzy that visits him, my son!

HYLLUS

Nay, I am crushed with this weight of misery—there is madness in my heart!

HERACLES (*awaking*)

O Zeus, to what land have I come? Who are these among whom I lie, tortured with unending agonies? Wretched, wretched that I am! Oh, that dire pest is gnawing me once more!

OLD MAN (*to* HYLLUS)

Knew I not how much better it was that thou shouldest keep silence, instead of scaring slumber from his brain and eyes?

HYLLUS

Nay, I cannot be patient when I behold this misery.

HERACLES

O thou Cenaean rock whereon mine altars rose, what a cruel reward hast thou won me for those fair offerings,—be Zeus my witness! Ah, to what ruin hast thou brought me, to what ruin! Would that I had never beheld thee for thy sorrow! Then had I never come face to face with this fiery madness, which no spell can soothe! Where is the charmer, where is the cunning healer, save Zeus alone, that shall lull this plague to rest? I should marvel, if he ever came within my ken!

strophe 1

Ah!

Leave me, hapless one, to my rest—leave me to my last rest!

strophe 2

Where art thou touching me? Whither wouldst thou turn me? Thou wilt kill me, thou wilt kill me! If there be any pang that slumbers, thou hast aroused it!

It hath seized me,—oh, the pest comes again!—Whence are ye, most ungrateful of all the Greeks? I wore out my troublous days in ridding Greece of pests, on the deep and in all forests; and now, when I am stricken, will no man succour me with merciful fire or sword?

antistrophe 1

Oh, will no one come and sever the head, at one fierce stroke, from this wretched body? Woe, woe is me!

OLD MAN

Son of Heracles, this task exceeds my strength,—help thou,—for strength is at thy command, too largely to need my aid in his relief.

HYLLUS

My hands are helping; but no resource, in myself or from another, avails me to make his life forget its anguish:—such is the doom appointed by Zeus!

HERACLES

strophe 3

O my son, where art thou? Raise me,—take hold of me,—thus, thus! Alas, my destiny!

antistrophe 2

Again, again the cruel pest leaps forth to rend me, the fierce plague with which none may cope!

O Pallas, Pallas, it tortures me again! Alas, my son, pity thy sire,—draw a blameless sword, and smite beneath my collar-bone, and heal this pain wherewith thy godless mother hath made me wild! So may I see her fall,—thus, even thus, as she hath destroyed me!

antistrophe 3

Sweet Hades, brother of Zeus, give me rest, give me rest,—end my woe by a swiftly-sped doom!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I shudder, friends, to hear these sorrows of our lord; what a man is here, and what torments afflict him!

HERACLES

Ah, fierce full oft, and grievous not in name alone, have been the labours of these hands, the burdens borne upon these shoulders! But no toil ever laid on me by the wife of Zeus or by the hateful Eurystheus was like unto this thing which the daughter of Oeneus, fair and false, hath fastened upon my back,—this woven net of the Furies, in which I perish! Glued to my sides, it hath eaten my flesh to the inmost parts; it is ever with me, sucking the channels of my breath; already it hath drained my fresh life-blood, and my whole body is wasted, a captive to these unutterable bonds.

Not the warrior on the battle-field, not the Giants' earth-born host, nor the might of savage beasts, hath ever done unto me thus,—not Hellas, nor the land of the alien, nor any land to which I have come as a deliverer: no, a woman, a weak woman, born not to the strength of man, all alone hath vanquished me, without stroke of sword!

Son, show thyself my son indeed, and do not honour a mother's name above a sire's: bring forth the woman that bare thee, and give her with thine own hands into my hand, that I may know of a truth which sight grieves thee most,—my tortured frame, or hers, when she suffers her righteous doom!

Go, my son, shrink not—and show thy pity for me, whom many might deem pitiful,—for me, moaning and weeping like a girl;—and the man lives not who can say that he ever saw me do thus before; no, without complaining I still went whither mine evil fortune led. But now, alas, the strong man hath been found a woman.

Approach, stand near thy sire, and see what a fate it is that hath brought me to this pass; for I will lift the veil. Behold! Look, all of you, on this miserable body; see how wretched, how piteous is my plight!

Ah, woe is me!

The burning throe of torment is there anew, it darts through my sides —I must wrestle once more with that cruel, devouring plague!

O thou lord of the dark realm, receive me! Smite me, O fire of Zeus! Hurl down thy thunderbolt, O King, send it, O father, upon my head! For again the pest is consuming me; it hath blazed forth, it hath started into fury! O hands, my hands, O shoulders and breast and trusty arms, ye, now in this plight, are the same whose force of old subdued the dweller in Nemea, the scourge of herdsmen, the lion, a creature that no man might approach or confront; ye tamed the Lernaean Hydra, and that monstrous host of double form, man joined to steed, a race with whom none may commune, violent, lawless, of surpassing might; ye tamed the Erymanthian beast, and the three-headed whelp of Hades underground, a resistless terror, offspring of the dread Echidna; ye tamed the dragon that guarded the golden fruit in the utmost places of the earth.

These toils and countless others have I proved, nor hath any man vaunted a triumph over my prowess. But now, with joints unhinged and with flesh torn to shreds, I have become the miserable prey of an unseen destroyer,—I, who am called the son of noblest mother,—I, whose reputed sire is Zeus, lord of the starry sky.

But ye may be sure of one thing:—though I am as nought, though I cannot move a step, yet she who hath done this deed shall feel my heavy hand even now: let her but come, and she shall learn to proclaim this message unto all, that in my death, as in my life, I chastised the wicked!

LEADER

Ah, hapless Greece, what mourning do I foresee for her, if she must lose this man!

HYLLUS

Father, since thy pause permits an answer, hear me, afflicted though thou art. I will ask thee for no more than is my due. Accept my counsels, in a calmer mood than that to which this anger stings thee: else thou canst not learn how vain is thy desire for vengeance, and how causeless thy resentment.

HERACLES

Say what thou wilt, and cease; in this my pain I understand nought of all thy riddling words.

HYLLUS

I come to tell thee of my mother,—how it is now with her, and how she sinned unwittingly.

HERACLES

Villain! What—hast thou dared to breathe her name again in my hearing,—the name of the mother who hath slain thy sire?

HYLLUS

Yea, such is her state that silence is unmeet.

HERACLES

Unmeet, truly, in view of her past crimes.

HYLLUS

And also of her deeds this day,—as thou wilt own.

HERACLES

Speak,—but give heed that thou be not found a traitor.

HYLLUS

These are my tidings. She is dead, lately slain.

HERACLES

By whose hand? A wondrous message, from a prophet of ill-omened voice!

HYLLUS

By her own hand, and no stranger's.

HERACLES

Alas, ere she died by mine, as she deserved!

HYLLUS

Even thy wrath would be turned, couldst thou hear all.

HERACLES

A strange preamble; but unfold thy meaning.

HYLLUS

The sum is this;—she erred, with a good intent.

HERACLES

Is it a good deed, thou wretch, to have slain thy sire?

HYLLUS

Nay, she thought to use a love-charm for thy heart, when she saw the new bride in the house; but missed her aim.

HERACLES

And what Trachinian deals in spells so potent?

HYLLUS

Nessus the Centaur persuaded her of old to inflame thy desire with such a charm.

HERACLES

Alas, alas, miserable that I am! Woe is me, I am lost,—undone, undone! No more for me the light of day! Alas, now I see in what a plight I stand! Go, my son,—for thy father's end hath come,—summon, I pray thee, all thy brethren; summon, too, the hapless Alcmena, in vain the bride of Zeus,—that ye may learn from my dying lips what oracles I know.

HYLLUS

Nay, thy mother is not here; as it chances, she hath her abode at Tiryns by the sea. Some of thy children she hath taken to live with her there, and others, thou wilt find, are dwelling in Thebe's town. But we who are with thee, my father, will render all service that is needed, at thy bidding.

HERACLES

Hear, then, thy task: now is the time to show what stuff is in thee, who art called my son.

It was foreshown to me by my Sire of old that I should perish by no creature that had the breath of life, but by one that had passed to dwell with Hades. So I have been slain by this savage Centaur, the living by the dead, even as the divine will had been foretold.

And I will show thee how later oracles tally therewith, confirming the old prophecy. I wrote them down in the grove of the Selli, dwellers on the hills, whose couch is on the ground; they were given by my Father's oak of many tongues; which said that, at the time which liveth and now is, my release from the toils laid upon me should be accomplished. And I

looked for prosperous days; but the meaning, it seems, was only that I should die; for toil comes no more to the dead.

Since, then, my son, those words are clearly finding their fulfilment, thou, on thy part, must lend me thine aid. Thou must not delay, and so provoke me to bitter speech: thou must consent and help with a good grace, as one who hath learned that best of laws, obedience to a sire.

HYLLUS

Yea, father,—though I fear the issue to which our talk hath brought me,—I will do thy good pleasure.

HERACLES

First of all, lay thy right hand in mine.

HYLLUS

For what purpose dost thou insist upon his pledge?

HERACLES

Give thy hand at once—disobey me not!

HYLLUS

Lo, there it is: thou shalt not be gainsaid.

HERACLES

Now, swear by the head of Zeus my sire!

HYLLUS

To do what deed? May this also be told?

HERACLES

To perform for me the task that I shall enjoin.

HYLLUS

I swear it, with Zeus for witness of the oath.

HERACLES

And pray that, if thou break this oath, thou mayest suffer.

HYLLUS

I shall not suffer, for I shall keep it:—yet so I pray.

HERACLES

Well, thou knowest the summit of Oeta, sacred to Zeus?

HYLLUS

Ay; I have often stood at his altar on that height.

HERACLES

Thither, then, thou must carry me up with thine own hands, aided by what friends thou wilt; thou shalt lop many a branch from the deep-rooted oak, and hew many a faggot also from the sturdy stock of the wild-olive; thou shalt lay my body thereupon, and kindle it with flaming pine-torch.

And let no tear of mourning be seen there; no, do this without lament and without weeping, if thou art indeed my son. But if thou do it not, even from the world below my curse and my wrath shall wait on thee for ever.

HYLLUS

Alas, my father, what hast thou spoken? How has thou dealt with me!

HERACLES

I have spoken that which thou must perform; if thou wilt not, then get thee some other sire, and be called my son no more!

HYLLUS

Woe, woe is me! What a deed dost thou require of me, my father,—that I should become thy murderer, guilty of thy blood!

HERACLES

Not so, in truth, but healer of my sufferings, sole physician of my pain!

HYLLUS

And how, by enkindling thy body, shall I heal it?

HERACLES

Nay, if that thought dismay thee, at least perform the rest.

HYLLUS

The service of carrying thee shall not be refused.

HERACLES

And the heaping of the pyre, as I have bidden?

HYLLUS

Yea, save that I will not touch it with mine own hand. All else will I do, and thou shalt have no hindrance on my part.

HERACLES

Well, so much shall be enough.—But add one small boon to thy large benefits.

HYLLUS

Be the boon never so large, it shall be granted.

HERACLES

Knowest thou, then, the girl whose sire was Eurytus?

HYLLUS

It is of Iole that thou speakest, if I mistake not.

HERACLES

Even so. This, in brief, is the charge that I give thee, my son. When I am dead, if thou wouldest show a pious remembrance of thine oath unto thy father, disobey me not, but take this woman to be thy wife. Let no other espouse her who hath lain at my side, but do thou, O my son, make that marriage-bond thine own. Consent: after loyalty in great matters, to rebel in less is to cancel the grace that had been won.

HYLLUS

Ah me, it is not well to be angry with a sick man: but who could bear to see him in such a mind?

HERACLES

Thy words show no desire to do my bidding.

HYLLUS

What! When she alone is to blame for my mother's death, and for thy present plight besides? Lives there the man who would make such a choice, unless he were maddened by avenging fiends?

Better were it, father, that I too should die, rather than live united to the worst of our foes!

HERACLES

He will render no reverence, it seems, to my dying prayer.—Nay, be sure that the curse of the gods will attend thee for disobedience to my voice.

HYLLUS

Ah, thou wilt soon show, methinks, how distempered thou art!

HERACLES

Yea, for thou art breaking the slumber of my plague.

HYLLUS

Hapless that I am! What perplexities surround me!

HERACLES

Yea, since thou deignest not to hear thy sire.

HYLLUS

But must I learn, then, to be impious, my father?

HERACLES

'Tis not impiety, if thou shalt gladden my heart.

HYLLUS

Dost thou command me, then, to do this deed, as a clear duty?

HERACLES

I command thee,—the gods bear me witness!

HYLLUS

Then will I do it, and refuse not,—calling upon the gods to witness thy deed. I can never be condemned for loyalty to thee, my father.

HERACLES

Thou endest well; and to these words, my son, quickly add the gracious deed, that thou mayest lay me on the pyre before any pain returns to rend or sting me.

Come, make haste and lift me! This, in truth, is rest from troubles; this is the end, the last end, of Heracles!

HYLLUS

Nothing, indeed, hinders the fulfilment of thy wish, since thy command constrains us, my father.

HERACLES (*chanting*)

Come, then, ere thou arouse this plague, O my stubborn soul, give me a curb as of steel on lips set like stone to stone, and let no cry escape them; seeing that the deed which thou art to do, though done perforce, is yet worthy of thy joy!

HYLLUS (*chanting*)

Lift him, followers! And grant me full forgiveness for this; but mark the great cruelty of the gods in the deeds that are being done. They beget children, they are hailed as fathers, and yet they can look upon such sufferings.

(*The attendants raise* HERACLES *on the litter and move slowly off, as* HYLLUS *chants to the* CHORUS *in the closing lines.*)

No man foresees the future; but the present is fraught with mourning for us, and with shame for the powers above, and verily with anguish beyond compare for him who endures this doom.

Maidens, come ye also, nor linger at the house; ye who have lately seen a dread death, with sorrows manifold and strange: and in all this there is nought but Zeus.[1]

1. There is a puzzling, almost Euripidean, ring to these last lines. They scarcely reflect the normal thought of Sophocles. It may be reasonable to suggest that the lines are a result of the poet's inability to resolve to his satisfaction the problems of the concluding section of the play.

V
ELECTRA

Characters in the Play

Orestes, *son of Agamemnon and* Clytemnestra
Electra
Chrysothemis } *sisters of* Orestes
An Old Man, *formerly the* Paedagogus *or Attendant of* Orestes
Clytemnestra
Aegisthus
Chorus of Women of Mycenae

Mute Persons

Pylades, *son of Strophius, King of Crisa, the friend of* Orestes.
A handmaid of Clytemnestra. Two attendants of Orestes

INTRODUCTION

THE *Electra*, the date of whose composition is unknown, gives us Sophocles' version of the legendary events interpreted by Aeschylus in his *Choephori*, and Euripides in his *Electra*. Sophocles' plot differs only in minor points from that of Aeschylus. In the Sophoclean play Orestes, whom Electra saved as a child by placing him in the care of the friendly King Strophius in Phocis, returns to avenge the murder of his father, Agamemnon. Clytemnestra and her paramour, Aegisthus, the murderers of Agamemnon on his return from Troy, have been ruling in Argos, but are haunted by the fear that one day Orestes will return to wreak his vengeance. Electra, who has made no effort to conceal her hatred for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, has been brutally treated by them, whereas her sisters by prudent silence have lived comfortably in the palace. Electra has clung steadfastly through long years to the hope that Orestes will appear to right the wrongs that she and her father have suffered. The play opens dramatically with the entrance of the long-absent Orestes.

Electra is the focal point of the play. Sophocles gives her a full-length portrait, largely through his familiar technique of placing her in contrast with the other persons of the play. In the scene with her sister, Chrysothemis, a close parallel to the scene between Antigone and Ismene in the *Antigone*, Electra's courage and fixity of purpose clearly emerge. Further details are added to the characterization when she comes face to face with Clytemnestra, or again, in a most dramatically effective scene, when she addresses the urn which she believes to contain the ashes of her brother, although, unknown to her, her brother stands living at her side. By the end of the play, Sophocles has skilfully delineated every salient feature of her being.

The action of the play centres on the consummation of an act of vengeance. In Aeschylus, the religious and psychological implications of such an act loom large, as do the psychological and emotional factors in the Euripidean counterpart. In the Sophoclean rendering, the act of murder and matricide is condoned. No Furies threaten Orestes, and the play ends on a note of triumph. It has been argued that Sophocles is here being archaic, if not archaistic, and is dealing with the problem in a

Homeric fashion, or at least according to a pre-Aeschylean theology. Perhaps it may be that Sophocles here was not primarily interested in probing the religious aspects of his problem, but rather in the psychological study, on the human level, of an individual caught in this particular situation. In this sense our play may be regarded as a dimly remote ancestor of *Hamlet* and dramas of its type.

ELECTRA

(SCENE:—*At Mycenae, before the palace of the Pelopidae. It is morning and the new-risen sun is bright. The* PAEDAGOGUS *enters on the left of the spectators, accompanied by the two youths,* ORESTES *and* PYLADES.)

PAEDAGOGUS

SON of him who led our hosts at Troy of old, son of Agamemnon!—now thou mayest behold with thine eyes all that thy soul hath desired so long. There is the ancient Argos of thy yearning,—that hallowed scene whence the gad-fly drove the daughter of Inachus; and there, Orestes, is the Lycean Agora, named from the wolf-slaying god; there, on the left, Hera's famous temple; and in this place to which we have come, deem that thou seest Mycenae rich in gold, with the house of the Pelopidae there, so often stained with bloodshed; whence I carried thee of yore, from the slaying of thy father, as thy kinswoman, thy sister, charged me; and saved thee, and reared thee up to manhood, to be the avenger of thy murdered sire.

Now, therefore, Orestes, and thou, best of friends, Pylades, our plans must be laid quickly; for lo, already the sun's bright ray is waking the songs of the birds into clearness, and the dark night of stars is spent. Before, then, anyone comes forth from the house, take counsel; seeing that the time allows not of delay, but is full ripe for deeds.

ORESTES

True friend and follower, how well dost thou prove thy loyalty to our house! As a steed of generous race, though old, loses not courage in danger, but pricks his ear, even so thou urgest us forward, and art foremost in our support. I will tell thee, then, what I have determined; listen closely to my words, and correct me, if I miss the mark in aught.

When I went to the Pythian oracle, to learn how I might avenge my father on his murderers, Phoebus gave me the response which thou art now to hear:—that alone, and by stealth, without aid of arms or numbers, I should snatch the righteous vengeance of my hand. Since, then, the god spake to us on this wise, thou must go into yonder house, when oppor-

tunity gives thee entrance, and learn all that is passing there, so that thou mayest report to us from sure knowledge. Thine age, and the lapse of time, will prevent them from recognising thee; they will never suspect who thou art, with that silvered hair. Let thy tale be that thou art a Phocian stranger, sent by Phanoteus; for he is the greatest of their allies. Tell them, and confirm it with thine oath, that Orestes hath perished by a fatal chance,—hurled at the Pythian games from his rapid chariot; be that the substance of thy story.

We, meanwhile, will first crown my father's tomb, as the god enjoined, with drink-offerings and the luxuriant tribute of severed hair; then come back, bearing in our hands an urn of shapely bronze,—now hidden in the brushwood, as I think thou knowest,—so to gladden them with the false tidings that this my body is no more, but has been consumed with fire and turned to ashes. Why should the omen trouble me, when by a feigned death I find life indeed, and win renown? I trow, no word is ill-omened, if fraught with gain. Often ere now have I seen wise men die in vain report; then, when they return home, they are held in more abiding honour: as I trust that from this rumour I also shall emerge in radiant life, and yet shine like a star upon my foes.

O my fatherland, and ye gods of the land, receive me with good fortune in this journey,—and ye also, halls of my fathers, for I come with a divine mandate to cleanse you righteously; send me not dishonoured from the land, but grant that I may rule over my possessions, and restore my house!

Enough;—be it now thy care, old man, to go and heed thy task; and we twain will go forth; for so occasion bids, chief ruler of every enterprise for men.

ELECTRA (*within*)

Ah me, ah me!

PAEDAGOGUS

Hark, my son,—from the doors, methought, came the sound of some handmaid moaning within.

ORESTES

Can it be the hapless Electra? Shall we stay here, and listen to her laments?

PAEDAGOGUS

No, no: before all else, let us seek to obey the command of Loxias, and thence make a fair beginning, by pouring libations to thy sire; that brings victory within our grasp, and gives us the mastery in all that we do.

(*Exeunt* PAEDAGOGUS *on the spectators' left,* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *on the right.—Enter* ELECTRA, *from the house. She is meanly clad.*)

ELECTRA (*chanting*)

systema

O thou pure sunlight, and thou air, earth's canopy, how often have ye heard the strains of my lament, the wild blows dealt against this bleeding breast, when dark night fails! And my wretched couch in yonder house of woe knows well, ere now, how I keep the watches of the night,—how often I bewail my hapless sire: to whom deadly Ares gave not of his gifts in a strange land, but my mother, and her mate Aegisthus, cleft his head with murderous axe, as woodmen fell an oak. And for this no plaint bursts from any lip save mine, when thou, my father, hath died a death so cruel and so piteous!

antisystema

But never will I cease from dirge and sore lament, while I look on the trembling rays of the bright stars, or on this light of day; but like the nightingale, slayer of her offspring, I will wail without ceasing, and cry aloud to all, here, at the doors of my father.

O home of Hades and Persephone! O Hermes of the shades! O potent Curse, and ye, dread daughters of the gods, Erinyes,—ye who behold when a life is reft by violence, when a bed is dishonoured by stealth,—come, help me, avenge the murder of my sire,—and send to me my brother; for I have no more the strength to bear up alone against the load of grief that weighs me down.

(*As* ELECTRA *finishes her lament, the* CHORUS OF WOMEN OF MYCENAE *enter. The following lines between* ELECTRA *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Ah, Electra, child of a wretched mother, why art thou ever pining thus in ceaseless lament for Agamemnon, who long ago was wickedly ensnared by thy false mother's wiles, and betrayed to death by a dastardly hand? Perish the author of that deed, if I may utter such a prayer!

ELECTRA

Ah, noble-hearted maidens, ye have come to soothe my woes. I know and feel it, it escapes me not; but I cannot leave this task undone, or cease from mourning for my hapless sire. Ah, friends whose love responds to mine in every mood, leave me to rave thus,—oh leave me, I entreat you!

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

But never by laments or prayers shalt thou recall thy sire from that lake of Hades to which all must pass. Nay, thine is a fatal course of grief, passing ever from due bounds into a cureless sorrow; wherein there is no deliverance from evils. Say, wherefore art thou enamoured of misery?

ELECTRA

Foolish is the child who forgets a parent's piteous death. No, dearer to my soul is the mourner that laments for Itys, Itys, evermore, that bird distraught with grief, the messenger of Zeus. Ah, queen of sorrow, Niobe, thee I deem divine,—thee, who evermore weepest in thy rocky tomb!

CHORUS

strophe 2

Not to thee alone of mortals, my daughter, hath come any sorrow which thou bearest less calmly than those within, thy kinswomen and sisters, Chrysothemis and Iphianassa,[1] who still live,—as he, too, lives, sorrowing in a secluded youth, yet happy in that this famous realm of Mycenae shall one day welcome him to his heritage, when the kindly guidance of Zeus shall have brought him to this land,—Orestes.

ELECTRA

Yes, I wait for him with unwearied longing, as I move on my sad path from day to day, unwed and childless, bathed in tears, bearing that endless doom of woe; but he forgets all that he has suffered and heard. What message comes to me, that is not belied? He is ever yearning to be with us, but, though he yearns, he never resolves.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Courage, my daughter, courage; great still in heaven is Zeus, who sees and governs all: leave thy bitter quarrel to him; forget not thy foes, but refrain from excess of wrath against them; for Time is a god who makes rough ways smooth. Not heedless is the son of Agamemnon, who dwells by Crisa's pastoral shore; not heedless is the god who reigns by Acheron.

ELECTRA

Nay, the best part of life hath passed away from me in hopelessness, and I have no strength left; I, who am pining away without children,—whom no loving champion shields,—but, like some de-

spised alien, I serve in the halls of my father, clad in this mean garb, and standing at a meagre board.

CHORUS

strophe 3

Piteous was the voice heard at his return, and piteous, as thy sire lay on the festal couch, when the straight, swift blow was dealt him with the blade of bronze. Guile was the plotter, Lust the slayer, dread parents of a dreadful shape; whether it was mortal that wrought therein, or god.

ELECTRA

O that bitter day, bitter beyond all that have come to me; O that night, O the horrors of that unutterable feast, the ruthless death-strokes that my father saw from the hands of twain, who took my life captive by treachery, who doomed me to woe! May the great god of Olympus give them sufferings in requital, and never may their splendour bring them joy, who have done such deeds!

CHORUS

antistrophe 3

Be advised to say no more; canst thou not see what conduct it is which already plunges thee so cruelly in self-made miseries? Thou hast greatly aggravated thy troubles, ever breeding wars with thy sullen soul; but such strife should not be pushed to a conflict with the strong.

ELECTRA

I have been forced to it,—forced by dread causes; I know my own passion, it escapes me not; but, seeing that the causes are so dire, I will never curb these frenzied plaints, while life is in me. Who indeed, ye kindly sisterhood, who that thinks aright, would deem that any word of solace could avail me? Forbear, forbear, my comforters! Such ills must be numbered with those which have no cure; I can never know a respite from my sorrows, or a limit to this wailing.

CHORUS

epode

At least it is in love, like a true-hearted mother, that I dissuade thee from adding misery to miseries.

ELECTRA

But what measure is there in my wretchedness? Say, how can it be right to neglect the dead? Was that impiety ever born in mortal? Never may I have praise of such; never, when my lot is cast

in pleasant places, may I cling to selfish ease, or dishonour my sire by restraining the wings of shrill lamentation!

For if the hapless dead is to lie in dust and nothingness, while the slayers pay not with blood for blood, all regard for man, all fear of heaven, will vanish from the earth.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I came, my child, in zeal for thy welfare no less than for mine own; but if I speak not well, then be it as thou wilt; for we will follow thee.

ELECTRA

I am ashamed, my friends, if ye deem me too impatient for my oft complaining; but, since a hard constraint forces me to this, bear with me. How indeed could any woman of noble nature refrain, who saw the calamities of a father's house, as I see them by day and night continually, not fading, but in the summer of their strength? I, who, first, from the mother that bore me have found bitter enmity; next, in mine own home I dwell with my father's murderers; they rule over me, and with them it rests to give or to withhold what I need.

And then think what manner of days I pass, when I see Aegisthus sitting on my father's throne, wearing the robes which he wore, and pouring libations at the hearth where he slew my sire; and when I see the outrage that crowns all, the murderer in our father's bed at our wretched mother's side, if mother she should be called, who is his wife; but so hardened is she that she lives with that accursed one, fearing no Erinys; nay, as if exulting in her deeds, having found the day on which she treacherously slew my father of old, she keeps it with dance and song, and month by month sacrifices sheep to the gods who have wrought her deliverance.

But I, hapless one, beholding it, weep and pine in the house, and bewail the unholy feast named after my sire,—weep to myself alone; since I may not even indulge my grief to the full measure of my yearning. For this woman, in professions so noble, loudly upbraids me with such taunts as these: 'Impious and hateful girl, hast thou alone lost a father, and is there no other mourner in the world? An evil doom be thine, and may the gods infernal give thee no riddance from thy present laments.'

Thus she insults; save when any one brings her word that Orestes is coming: then, infuriated, she comes up to me, and cries;—'Hast not *thou* brought this upon me? Is not this deed thine, who didst steal Orestes from my hands, and privily convey him forth? Yet be sure that thou shalt have thy due reward.' So she shrieks; and, aiding her, the renowned spouse at her side is vehement in the same strain,—that abject dastard, that utter pest, who fights his battles with the help of women. But I, looking

ever for Orestes to come and end these woes, languish in my misery. Always intending to strike a blow, he has worn out every hope that I could conceive. In such a case, then, friends, there is no room for moderation or for reverence; in sooth, the stress of ills leaves no choice but to follow evil ways.

LEADER

Say, is Aegisthus near while thou speakest thus, or absent from home?

ELECTRA

Absent, certainly; do not think that I should have come to the doors, if he had been near; but just now he is afield.

LEADER

Might I converse with thee more freely, if this is so?

ELECTRA

He is not here, so put thy question; what wouldst thou?

LEADER

I ask thee, then, what sayest thou of thy brother? Will he come soon, or is he delaying? I fain would know.

ELECTRA

He promises to come; but he never fulfils the promise.

LEADER

Yea, a man will pause on the verge of a great work.

ELECTRA

And yet I saved *him* without pausing.

LEADER

Courage; he is too noble to fail his friends.

ELECTRA

I believe it; or I should not have lived so long.

LEADER

Say no more now; for I see thy sister coming from the house, Chrysothemis, daughter of the same sire and mother, with sepulchral gifts in her hands, such as are given to those in the world below.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS *enters from the palace. She is richly dressed.*)

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Why, sister, hast thou come forth once more to declaim thus at the public doors? Why wilt thou not learn with any lapse of time to desist

from vain indulgence of idle wrath? Yet this I know,—that I myself am grieved at our plight; indeed, could I find the strength, I would show what love I bear them. But now, in these troubled waters, 'tis best, methinks, to shorten sail; I care not to seem active, without the power to hurt. And would that thine own conduct were the same! Nevertheless, right is on the side of thy choice, not of that which I advise; but if I am to live in freedom, our rulers must be obeyed in all things.

ELECTRA

Strange indeed, that thou, the daughter of such a sire as thine, shouldst forget him, and think only of thy mother! All thy admonitions to me have been taught by her; no word is thine own. Then take thy choice,—to be imprudent; or prudent, but forgetful of thy friends: thou, who hast just said that, couldst thou find the strength, thou wouldst show thy hatred of them; yet, when I am doing my utmost to avenge my sire, thou givest no aid, but seekest to turn thy sister from her deed.

Does not this crown our miseries with cowardice? For tell me,—or let me tell thee,—what I should gain by ceasing from these laments? Do I not live?—miserably, I know, yet well enough for me. And I vex *them,* thus rendering honour to the dead, if pleasure can be felt in that world. But thou, who tellest me of thy hatred, hatest in word alone, while in deeds thou art with the slayers of thy sire. I, then, would never yield to them, though I were promised the gifts which now make thee proud; thine be the richly-spread table and the life of luxury. For me, be it food enough that I do not wound mine own conscience; I covet not such privilege as thine,—nor wouldst thou, wert thou wise. But now, when thou mightest be called daughter of the noblest father among men, be called the child of thy mother; so shall thy baseness be most widely seen, in betrayal of thy dead sire and of thy kindred.

LEADER

No angry word, I entreat! For both of you there is good in what is urged,—if thou, Electra, wouldst learn to profit by her counsel, and she, again, by thine.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

For my part, friends, I am not wholly unused to her discourse; nor should I have touched upon this theme, had I not heard that she was threatened with a dread doom, which shall restrain her from her long-drawn laments.

ELECTRA

Come, declare it then, this terror! If thou canst tell me of aught worse than my present lot, I will resist no more.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Indeed, I will tell thee all that I know. They purpose, if thou wilt not cease from these laments, to send thee where thou shalt never look upon the sunlight, but pass thy days in a dungeon beyond the borders of this land, there to chant thy dreary strain. Bethink thee, then, and do not blame me hereafter, when the blow hath fallen; now is the time to be wise.

ELECTRA

Have they indeed resolved to treat me thus?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Assuredly, whenever Aegisthus comes home.

ELECTRA

If that be all, then may he arrive with speed!

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Misguided one! what dire prayer is this?

ELECTRA

That he may come, if he hath any such intent.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

That thou mayst suffer—what? Where are thy wits?

ELECTRA

That I may fly as far as may be from you all.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

But hast thou no care for thy present life?

ELECTRA

Aye, my life is marvellously fair.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

It might be, couldst thou only learn prudence.

ELECTRA

Do not teach me to betray my friends.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I do not,—but to bend before the strong.

ELECTRA

Thine be such flattery: those are not my ways.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
'Tis well, however, not to fall by folly.

ELECTRA
I will fall, if need be, in the cause of my sire.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
But our father, I know, pardons me for this.

ELECTRA
It is for cowards to find peace in such maxims.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
So thou wilt not hearken, and take my counsel?

ELECTRA
No, verily; long may be it before I am so foolish.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Then I will go forth upon mine errand.

ELECTRA
And whither goest thou? To whom bearest thou these offerings?

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Our mother sends me with funeral libations for our sire.

ELECTRA
How sayest thou? For her deadliest foe?

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Slain by her own hand—so thou wouldest say.

ELECTRA
What friend hath persuaded her? Whose wish was this?

CHRYSOTHEMIS
The cause, I think, was some dread vision of the night.

ELECTRA
Gods of our house! be ye with me—now at last!

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Dost thou find any encouragement in this terror?

ELECTRA
If thou wouldst tell me the vision, then I could answer.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, I can tell but little of the story.

ELECTRA

Tell what thou canst; a little word hath often marred, or made, men's fortunes.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

'Tis said that she beheld our sire, restored to the sunlight, at her side once more; then he took the sceptre,—once his own, but now borne by Aegisthus,—and planted it at the hearth; and thence a fruitful bough sprang upward, wherewith the whole land of Mycenae was overshadowed. Such was the tale that I heard told by one who was present when she declared her dream to the Sun-god. More than this I know not,—save that she sent me by reason of that fear. So by the gods of our house I beseech thee, hearken to me, and be not ruined by folly! For if thou repel me now, thou wilt come back to seek me in thy trouble.

ELECTRA

Nay, dear sister, let none of these things in thy hands touch the tomb; for neither custom nor piety allows thee to dedicate gifts or bring libations to our sire from a hateful wife. No—to the winds with them! or bury them deep in the earth, where none of them shall ever come near his place of rest; but, when she dies, let her find these treasures laid up for her below.

And were she not the most hardened of all women, she would never have sought to pour these offerings of enmity on the grave of him whom she slew. Think now if it is likely that the dead in the tomb should take these honours kindly at her hand, who ruthlessly slew him, like a foeman, and mangled him, and, for ablution, wiped off the blood-stains on his head? Canst thou believe that these things which thou bringest will absolve her of the murder?

It is not possible. No, cast these things aside; give him rather a lock cut from thine own tresses, and on my part, hapless that I am,—scant gifts these, but my best,—this hair, not glossy with unguents, and this girdle, decked with no rich ornament. Then fall down and pray that he himself may come in kindness from the world below, to aid us against our foes; and that the young Orestes may live to set his foot upon his foes in victorious might, that henceforth we may crown our father's tomb with wealthier hands than those which grace it now.

I think, indeed, I think that he also had some part in sending her these appalling dreams; still, sister, do this service, to help thyself, and me, and him, that most beloved of all men, who rests in the realm of Hades, thy sire and mine.

LEADER

The maiden counsels piously; and thou, friend, wilt do her bidding, if thou art wise.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I will. When a duty is clear, reason forbids that two voices should contend, and claims the hastening of the deed. Only, when I attempt this task, aid me with your silence, I entreat you, my friends; for, should my mother hear of it, methinks I shall yet have cause to rue my venture. (CHRYSOTHEMIS *departs, to take the offerings to Agamemnon's grave.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

If I am not an erring seer and one who fails in wisdom, Justice, that hath sent the presage, will come, triumphant in her righteous strength,—will come ere long, my child, to avenge. There is courage in my heart, through those new tidings of the dream that breathes comfort. Not forgetful is thy sire, the lord of Hellas; not forgetful is the two-edged axe of bronze that struck the blow of old, and slew him with foul cruelty.

antistrophe

The Erinys of untiring feet, who is lurking in her dread ambush, will come, as with the march and with the might of a great host. For wicked ones have been fired with passion that hurried them to a forbidden bed, to accursed bridals, to a marriage stained with guilt of blood. Therefore am I sure that the portent will not fail to bring woe upon the partners in crime. Verily mortals cannot read the future in fearful dreams or oracles, if this vision of the night find not due fulfilment.

epode

O chariot-race of Pelops long ago, source of many a sorrow, what weary troubles hast thou brought upon this land! For since Myrtilus sank to rest beneath the waves, when a fatal and cruel hand hurled him to destruction out of the golden car, this house was never yet free from misery and violence.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *enters from the palace.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

At large once more, it seems, thou rangest,—for Aegisthus is not here, who always kept thee at least from passing the gates, to shame thy friends. But now, since he is absent, thou takest no heed of me; though

thou hast said of me oft-times, and to many, that I am a bold and lawless tyrant, who insults thee and thine. I am guilty of no insolence; I do but return the taunts that I often hear from thee.

Thy father—this is thy constant pretext—was slain by me. Yes, by me—I know it well; it admits of no denial; for Justice slew him, and not I alone,—Justice, whom it became thee to support, hadst thou been right-minded; seeing that this father of thine, whom thou art ever lamenting, was the one man of the Greeks who had the heart to sacrifice thy sister to the gods—he, the father, who had not shared the mother's pangs.

Come, tell me now, wherefore, or to please whom, did he sacrifice her? To please the Argives, thou wilt say? Nay, they had no right to slay my daughter. Or if, forsooth, it was to screen his brother Menelaus that he slew my child, was he not to pay me the penalty for that? Had not Menelaus two children, who should in fairness have been taken before my daughter, as sprung from the sire and mother who had caused that voyage? Or had Hades some strange desire to feast on my offspring, rather than on hers? Or had that accursèd father lost all tenderness for the children of my womb, while he was tender to the children of Menelaus? Was not that the part of a callous and perverse parent? I think so, though I differ from thy judgment; and so would say the dead, if she could speak. For myself, then, I view the past without dismay; but if thou deemest me perverse, see that thine own judgment is just, before thou blame thy neighbour.

ELECTRA

This time thou canst not say that I have done anything to provoke such words from thee. But, if thou wilt give me leave, I fain would declare the truth, in the cause alike of my dead sire and of my sister.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Indeed, thou hast my leave; and didst thou always address me in such a tone, thou wouldst be heard without pain.

ELECTRA

Then I will speak. Thou sayest that thou hast slain my father. What word could bring thee deeper shame than that, whether the deed was just or not? But I must tell thee that thy deed was not just; no, thou wert drawn on to it by the wooing of the base man who is now thy spouse.

Ask the huntress Artemis what sin she punished when she stayed the frequent winds at Aulis; or I will tell thee; for we may not learn from her. My father—so I have heard—was once disporting himself in the grove of the goddess, when his footfall startled a dappled and antlered stag; he shot it, and chanced to utter a certain boast concerning its slaughter. Wroth thereat, the daughter of Leto detained the Greeks, that, in

quittance for the wild creature's life, my father should yield up the life of his own child. Thus it befell that she was sacrificed; since the fleet had no other release, homeward or to Troy; and for that cause, under sore constraint and with sore reluctance, at last he slew her—not for the sake of Menelaus.

But grant—for I will take thine own plea—grant that the motive of his deed was to benefit his brother;—was that a reason for his dying by thy hand? Under what law? See that, in making such a law for men, thou make not trouble and remorse for thyself; for, if we are to take blood for blood, thou wouldst be the first to die, didst thou meet with thy desert.

But look if thy pretext is not false. For tell me, if thou wilt, wherefore thou art now doing the most shameless deeds of all,—dwelling as wife with that blood-guilty one, who first helped thee to slay my sire, and bearing children to him, while thou hast cast out the earlier-born, the stainless offspring of a stainless marriage. How can I praise these things? Or wilt thou say that this, too, is thy vengeance for thy daughter? Nay, a shameful plea, if so thou plead; 'tis not well to wed an enemy for a daughter's sake.

But indeed I may not even counsel thee,—who shriekest that I revile my mother; and truly I think that to me thou art less a mother than a mistress; so wretched is the life that I live, ever beset with miseries by thee and by thy partner. And that other, who scarce escaped thy hand, the hapless Orestes, is wearing out his ill-starred days in exile. Often hast thou charged me with rearing him to punish thy crime; and I would have done so, if I could, thou mayst be sure:—for that matter, denounce me to all, as disloyal, if thou wilt, or petulant, or impudent; for if I am accomplished in such ways, methinks I am no unworthy child of thee.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I see that she breathes forth anger; but whether justice be with her, for this she seems to care no longer.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*to the* CHORUS)

And what manner of care do I need to use against her, who hath thus insulted a mother, and this at her ripe age? Thinkest thou not that she would go forward to any deed, without shame?

ELECTRA

Now be assured that I do feel shame for this, though thou believe it not; I know that my behaviour is unseemly, and becomes me ill. But then the enmity on thy part, and thy treatment, compel me in mine own despite to do thus; for base deeds are taught by base.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Thou brazen one! Truly I and my sayings and my deeds give thee too much matter for words.

ELECTRA

The words are thine, not mine; for thine is the action; and the acts find the utterance.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now by our lady Artemis, thou shalt not fail to pay for this boldness, so soon as Aegisthus returns.

ELECTRA

Lo, thou art transported by anger, after granting me free speech, and hast no patience to listen.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now wilt thou not hush thy clamour, or even suffer me to sacrifice, when I have permitted *thee* to speak unchecked?

ELECTRA

I hinder not,—begin thy rites, I pray thee; and blame not my voice, for I shall say no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Raise then, my handmaid, the offerings of many fruits, that I may uplift my prayers to this our king, for deliverance from my present fears. Lend now a gracious ear, O Phoebus our defender, to my words, though they be dark; for I speak not among friends, nor is it meet to unfold my whole thought to the light, while *she* stands near me, lest with her malice and her garrulous cry she spread some rash rumour throughout the town: but hear me thus, since on this wise I must speak.

That vision which I saw last night in doubtful dreams—if it hath come for my good, grant, Lycean king, that it be fulfilled; but if for harm, then let it recoil upon my foes. And if any are plotting to hurl me by treachery from the high estate which now is mine, permit them not; rather vouchsafe that, still living thus unscathed, I may bear sway over the house of the Atreidae and this realm, sharing prosperous days with the friends who share them now, and with those of my children from whom no enmity or bitterness pursues me.

O Lycean Apollo, graciously hear these prayers, and grant them to us all, even as we ask! For the rest, though I be silent, I deem that thou, a god, must know it; all things, surely, are seen by the sons of Zeus.

(*The* PAEDAGOGUS *enters.*)

PAEDAGOGUS

Ladies, might a stranger crave to know if this be the palace of the king Aegisthus?

LEADER

It is, sir; thou thyself hast guessed aright.

PAEDAGOGUS

And am I right in surmising that this lady is his consort? She is of queenly aspect.

LEADER

Assuredly: thou art in the presence of the queen.

PAEDAGOGUS

Hail, royal lady! I bring glad tidings to thee and to Aegisthus, from a friend.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I welcome the omen; but I would fain know from thee, first, who may have sent thee.

PAEDAGOGUS

Phanoteus the Phocian, on a weighty mission.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What is it, sir? Tell me: coming from a friend, thou wilt bring, I know, a kindly message.

PAEDAGOGUS

Orestes is dead; that is the sum.

ELECTRA

Oh, miserable that I am! I am lost this day!

CLYTEMNESTRA

What sayest thou, friend, what sayest thou?—listen not to her!

PAEDAGOGUS

I said, and say again—Orestes is dead.

ELECTRA

I am lost, hapless one, I am undone!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*to* ELECTRA)

See thou to thine own concerns.—But do thou, sir, tell me exactly,—how did he perish?

PAEDAGOGUS

I was sent for that purpose, and will tell thee all. Having gone to the renowned festival, the pride of Greece, for the Delphian games, when he heard the loud summons to the foot-race which was first to be decided, he entered the lists, a brilliant form, a wonder in the eyes of all there; and, having finished his course at the point where it began, he went out with the glorious meed of victory. To speak briefly, where there is much to tell, I know not the man whose deeds and triumphs have matched his; but one thing thou must know; in all the contests that the judges announced, he bore away the prize; and men deemed him happy, as oft as the herald proclaimed him an Argive, by name Orestes, son of Agamemnon, who once gathered the famous armament of Greece.

Thus far, 'twas well; but, when a god sends harm, not even the strong man can escape. For, on another day, when chariots were to try their speed at sunrise, he entered, with many charioteers. One was an Achaean, one from Sparta, two masters of yoked cars were Libyans; Orestes, driving Thessalian mares, came fifth among them; the sixth from Aetolia, with chestnut colts; a Magnesian was the seventh; the eighth, with white horses, was of Aenian stock; the ninth, from Athens, built of gods; there was a Boeotian too, making the tenth chariot.

They took their stations where the appointed umpires placed them by lot and ranged the cars; then, at the sound of the brazen trump, they started. All shouted to their horses, and shook the reins in their hands; the whole course was filled with the noise of rattling chariots; the dust flew upward; and all, in a confused throng, plied their goads unsparingly, each of them striving to pass the wheels and the snorting steeds of his rivals; for alike at their backs and at their rolling wheels the breath of the horses foamed and smote.

Orestes, driving close to the pillar at either end of the course, almost grazed it with his wheel each time, and, giving rein to the trace-horse on the right, checked the horse on the inner side. Hitherto, all the chariots had escaped overthrow; but presently the Aenian's hard-mouthed colts ran away, and, swerving, as they passed from the sixth into the seventh round, dashed their foreheads against the team of the Barcaean. Other mishaps followed the first, shock on shock and crash on crash, till the whole race-ground of Crisa was strewn with the wreck of the chariots.

Seeing this, the wary charioteer from Athens drew aside and paused, allowing the billow of chariots, surging in mid course, to go by. Orestes was driving last, keeping his horses behind,—for his trust was in the end; but when he saw that the Athenian was alone left in, he sent a shrill cry ringing through the ears of his swift colts, and gave chase. Team was brought level with team, and so they raced,—first one man, then the other, showing his head in front of the chariots.

Hitherto the ill-fated Orestes had passed safely through every round, steadfast in his steadfast car; at last, slackening his left rein while the horse was turning, unawares he struck the edge of the pillar; he broke the axle-box in twain; he was thrown over the chariot-rail; he was caught in the shapely reins; and, as he fell on the ground, his colts were scattered into the middle of the course.

But when the people saw him fallen from the car, a cry of pity went up for the youth, who had done such deeds and was meeting such a doom, —now dashed to earth, now tossed feet uppermost to the sky,—till the charioteers, with difficulty checking the career of his horses, loosed him, so covered with blood that no friend who saw it would have known the hapless corpse. Straightway they burned it on a pyre; and chosen men of Phocis are bringing in a small urn of bronze the sad dust of that mighty form, to find due burial in his fatherland.

Such is my story,—grievous to hear, if words can grieve; but for us, who beheld, the greatest of sorrows that these eyes have seen.

LEADER

Alas, alas! Now, methinks, the stock of our ancient masters hath utterly perished, root and branch.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O Zeus, what shall I call these tidings,—glad tidings? Or dire, but gainful? 'Tis a bitter lot, when mine own calamities make the safety of my life.

PAEDAGOGUS

Why art thou so downcast, lady, at this news?

CLYTEMNESTRA

There is a strange power in motherhood; a mother may be wronged, but she never learns to hate her child.

PAEDAGOGUS

Then it seems that we have come in vain.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, not in vain; how canst thou say 'in vain,' when thou hast brought me sure proofs of his death?—His, who sprang from mine own life, yet, forsaking me who had suckled and reared him, became an exile and an alien; and, after he went out of this land, he saw me no more; but, charging me with the murder of his sire, he uttered dread threats against me; so that neither by night nor by day could sweet sleep cover mine eyes, but from moment to moment I lived in fear of death. Now, however— since this day I am rid of terror from him, and from this girl,—that worse

plague who shared my home, while still she drained my very life-blood,—now, methinks, for aught that she can threaten, I shall pass my days in peace.

ELECTRA

Ah, woe is me! Now, indeed, Orestes, thy fortune may be lamented, when it is thus with thee, and thou art mocked by this thy mother! Is it not well?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Not with thee; but his state is well.

ELECTRA

Hear, Nemesis of him who hath lately died!

CLYTEMNESTRA

She hath heard who should be heard, and hath ordained well.

ELECTRA

Insult us, for this is the time of thy triumph.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then will not Orestes and thou silence me?

ELECTRA

We are silenced; much less should we silence thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Thy coming, sir, would deserve large recompense, if thou hast hushed her clamorous tongue.

PAEDAGOGUS

Then I may take my leave, if all is well.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Not so; thy welcome would then be unworthy of me, and of the ally who sent thee. Nay, come thou in; and leave her without, to make loud lament for herself and for her friends.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *and the* PAEDAGOGUS *enter the palace.*)

ELECTRA

How think ye? Was there not grief and anguish there, wondrous weeping and wailing of that miserable mother, for the son who perished by such a fate? Nay, she left us with a laugh! Ah, woe is me! Dearest Orestes, how is my life quenched by thy death! Thou hast torn away with thee from my heart the only hopes which still were mine,—that thou wouldst live to return some day, an avenger of thy sire, and of me unhappy. But now—whither shall I turn? I am alone, bereft of thee, as of my father.

Henceforth I must be a slave again among those whom most I hate, my father's murderers. Is it not well with me? But never, at least, henceforward, will I enter the house to dwell with them; nay, at these gates I will lay me down, and here, without a friend, my days shall wither. Therefore, if any in the house be wroth, let them slay me; for 'tis a grace, if I die, but if I live, a pain; I desire life no more.

(*The following lines between* ELECTRA *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Where are the thunderbolts of Zeus, or where is the bright Sun, if they look upon these things, and brand them not, but rest?

ELECTRA

Woe, woe, ah me, ah me!

CHORUS

O daughter, why weepest thou?

ELECTRA (*with hands outstretched to heaven*)

Alas!

CHORUS

Utter no rash cry!

ELECTRA

Thou wilt break my heart!

CHORUS

How meanest thou?

ELECTRA

If thou suggest a hope concerning those who have surely passed to the realm below, thou wilt trample yet more upon my misery.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Nay, I know how, ensnared by a woman for a chain of gold, the prince Amphiaraus found a grave; and now beneath the earth—

ELECTRA

Ah me, ah me!

CHORUS

—he reigns in fulness of force.

ELECTRA

Alas!

CHORUS

Alas indeed! for the murderess—

ELECTRA

Was slain.

CHORUS

Yea.

ELECTRA

I know it, I know it; for a champion arose to avenge the mourning dead; but to me no champion remains; for he who yet was left hath been snatched away.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Hapless art thou, and hapless is thy lot!

ELECTRA

Well know I that, too well,—I, whose life is a torrent of woes dread and dark, a torrent that surges through all the months!

CHORUS

We have seen the course of thy sorrow.

ELECTRA

Cease, then, to divert me from it, when no more—

CHORUS

How sayest thou?

ELECTRA

—when no more can I have the comfort of hope from a brother, the seed of the same noble sire.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

For all men it is appointed to die.

ELECTRA

What, to die as that ill-starred one died, amid the tramp of racing steeds, entangled in the reins that dragged him?

CHORUS

Cruel was his doom, beyond thought!

ELECTRA

Yea, surely; when in foreign soil, without ministry of my hands—

CHORUS

Alas!

ELECTRA

—he is buried, ungraced by me with sepulture or with tears.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS *enters in excitement.*)

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Joy wings my feet, dear sister, not careful of seemliness, if I come with speed; for I bring joyful news, to relieve thy long sufferings and sorrows.

ELECTRA

And whence couldst *thou* find help for my woes, whereof no cure can be imagined?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Orestes is with us,—know this from my lips,—in living presence, as surely as thou seest me here.

ELECTRA

What, art thou mad, poor girl? Art thou laughing at my sorrows, and thine own?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, by our father's hearth, I speak not in mockery; I tell thee that he is with us indeed.

ELECTRA

Ah, woe is me! And from whom hast thou heard this tale, which thou believest so lightly?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I believe it on mine own knowledge, not on hearsay; I have seen clear proofs.

ELECTRA

What hast thou seen, poor girl, to warrant thy belief? Whither, I wonder hast thou turned thine eyes, that thou art fevered with this baneful fire?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Then, for the gods' love, listen, that thou mayest know my story, before deciding whether I am sane or foolish.

ELECTRA

Speak on, then, if thou findest pleasure in speaking.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Well, thou shalt hear all that I have seen. When I came to our father's ancient tomb, I saw that streams of milk had lately flowed from the top of the mound, and that his sepulchre was encircled with garlands of all flowers that blow. I was astonished at the sight, and peered about, lest haply some one should be close to my side. But when I perceived that all the place was in stillness, I crept nearer to the tomb; and on the mound's edge I saw a lock of hair, freshly severed.

And the moment that I saw it, ah me, a familiar image rushed upon my soul, telling me that there I beheld a token of him whom most I love, Orestes. Then I took it in my hands, and uttered no ill-omened word, but the tears of joy straightway filled mine eyes. And I know well, as I knew then, that this fair tribute has come from none but him. Whose part else was that, save mine and thine? And I did it not, I know,—nor thou; how shouldst thou?—when thou canst not leave this house, even to worship the gods, but at thy peril. Nor, again, does our mother's heart incline to do such deeds, nor could she have so done without our knowledge.

No, these offerings are from Orestes! Come, dear sister, courage! No mortal life is attended by a changeless fortune. Ours was once gloomy; but this day, perchance, will seal the promise of much good.

ELECTRA

Alas for thy folly! How I have been pitying thee!

CHRYSOTHEMIS

What, are not my tidings welcome?

ELECTRA

Thou knowest not whither or into what dreams thou wanderest.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Should I not know what mine own eyes have seen?

ELECTRA

He is dead, poor girl; and thy hopes in that deliverer are gone: look not to him.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Woe, woe is me! From whom hast thou heard this?

ELECTRA

From the man who was present when he perished.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

And where is he? Wonder steals over my mind.

ELECTRA

He is within, a guest not unpleasing to our mother.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Ah, woe is me! Whose, then, can have been those ample offerings to our father's tomb?

ELECTRA

Most likely, I think, some one brought those gifts in memory of the dead Orestes.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Oh, hapless that I am! And I was bringing such news in joyous haste, ignorant, it seems, how dire was our plight; but now that I have come, I find fresh sorrows added to the old!

ELECTRA

So stands thy case; yet, if thou wilt hearken to me, thou wilt lighten the load of our present trouble.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Can I ever raise the dead to life?

ELECTRA

I meant not that; I am not so foolish.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

What biddest thou, then, for which my strength avails?

ELECTRA

That thou be brave in doing what I enjoin.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, if any good can be done, I will not refuse.

ELECTRA

Remember, nothing succeeds without toil.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I know it, and will share thy burden with all my power.

ELECTRA

Hear, then, how I am resolved to act. As for the support of friends, thou thyself must know that we have none; Hades hath taken our friends away, and we two are left alone. I, so long as I heard that my brother

still lived and prospered, had hopes that he would yet come to avenge the murder of our sire. But now that he is no more, I look next to thee, not to flinch from aiding me thy sister to slay our father's murderer, Aegisthus:—I must have no secret from thee more.

How long art thou to wait inactive? What hope is left standing, to which thine eyes can turn? Thou hast to complain that thou art robbed of thy father's heritage; thou hast to mourn that thus far thy life is fading without nuptial song or wedded love. Nay, and do not hope that such joys will ever be thine; Aegisthus is not so ill-advised as ever to permit that children should spring from thee or me for his own sure destruction. But if thou wilt follow my counsels, first thou wilt win praise of piety from our dead sire below, and from our brother too; next, thou shalt be called free henceforth, as thou wert born, and shalt find worthy bridals; for noble natures draw the gaze of all.

Then seest thou not what fair fame thou wilt win for thyself and for me, by hearkening to my word? What citizen or stranger, when he sees us, will not greet us with praises such as these?—'Behold these two sisters, my friends, who saved their father's house; who, when their foes were firmly planted of yore, took their lives in their hands and stood forth as avengers of blood! Worthy of love are these twain, worthy of reverence from all; at festivals, and wherever the folk are assembled, let these be honoured of all men for their prowess.' Thus will every one speak of us, so that in life and in death our glory shall not fail.

Come, dear sister, hearken! Work with thy sire, share the burden of thy brother, win rest from woes for me and for thyself,—mindful of this, that an ignoble life brings shame upon the noble.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

In such case as this, forethought is helpful for those who speak and those who hear.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Yea, and before she spake, my friends, were she blest with a sound mind, she would have remembered caution, as she doth not remember it.

Now whither canst thou have turned thine eyes, that thou art arming thyself with such rashness, and calling me to aid thee? Seest thou not, thou art a woman, not a man, and no match for thine adversaries in strength? And their fortune prospers day by day, while ours is ebbing and coming to nought. Who, then, plotting to vanquish a foe so strong, shall escape without suffering deadly scathe? See that we change not our evil plight to worse, if any one hears these words. It brings us no relief or benefit, if, after winning fair fame, we die an ignominious death; for mere death is not the bitterest, but rather when one who craves to die cannot obtain even that boon.

Nay, I beseech thee, before we are utterly destroyed, and leave our house desolate, restrain thy rage! I will take care that thy words remain secret and harmless; and learn thou the prudence, at last though late, of yielding, when so helpless, to thy rulers.

LEADER

Hearken; there is no better gain for mortals to win than foresight and a prudent mind.

ELECTRA

Thou hast said nothing unlooked-for; I well knew that thou wouldst reject what I proffered. Well! I must do this deed with mine own hand, and alone; for assuredly I will not leave it void.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Alas! Would thou hadst been so purposed on the day of our father's death! What mightst thou not have wrought?

ELECTRA

My nature was the same then, but my mind less ripe.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Strive to keep such a mind through all thy life.

ELECTRA

These counsels mean that thou wilt not share my deed.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

No; for the venture is likely to bring disaster.

ELECTRA

I admire thy prudence; thy cowardice I hate.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I will listen not less calmly when thou praise me.

ELECTRA

Never fear to suffer that from me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Time enough in the future to decide that.

ELECTRA

Begone; there is no power to help in thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Not so; but in thee, no mind to learn.

ELECTRA
Go, declare all this to thy mother!

CHRYSOTHEMIS
But, again, I do not hate thee with such a hate.

ELECTRA
Yet know at least to what dishonour thou bringest me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Dishonour, no! I am only thinking of thy good.

ELECTRA
Am I bound, then, to follow thy rule of right?

CHRYSOTHEMIS
When thou art wise, then thou shalt be our guide.

ELECTRA
Sad, that one who speaks so well should speak amiss!

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Thou hast well described the fault to which thou cleavest.

ELECTRA
How? Dost thou not think that I speak with justice?

CHRYSOTHEMIS
But sometimes justice itself is fraught with harm.

ELECTRA
I care not to live by such a law.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Well, if thou must do this, thou wilt praise me yet.

ELECTRA
And do it I will, no whit dismayed by thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Is this so indeed? Wilt thou not change thy counsels?

ELECTRA
No, for nothing is more hateful than bad counsel.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Thou seemest to agree with nothing that I urge.

ELECTRA

My resolve is not new, but long since fixed.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Then I will go; thou canst not be brought to approve my words, nor I to commend thy conduct.

ELECTRA

Nay, go within; never will I follow thee, however much thou mayst desire it; it were great folly even to attempt an idle quest.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, if thou art wise in thine own eyes, be such wisdom thine; by and by, when thou standest in evil plight, thou wilt praise my words.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS *goes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

When we see the birds of the air, with sure instinct, careful to nourish those who give them life and nurture, why do not we pay these debts in like measure? Nay, by the lightning-flash of Zeus, by Themis throned in heaven, it is not long till sin brings sorrow.

Voice that comest to the dead beneath the earth, send a piteous cry, I pray thee, to the son of Atreus in that world, a joyless message of dishonour;

antistrophe 1

tell him that the fortunes of his house are now distempered; while, among his children, strife of sister with sister hath broken the harmony of loving days. Electra, forsaken, braves the storm alone; she bewails alway, hapless one, her father's fate, like the nightingale unwearied in lament; she recks not of death, but is ready to leave the sunlight, could she but quell the two Furies of her house. Who shall match such noble child of noble sire?

strophe 2

No generous soul deigns, by a base life, to cloud a fair repute, and leave a name inglorious; as thou, too, O my daughter, hast chosen to mourn all thy days with those that mourn, and hast spurned dishonour, that thou mightest win at once a twofold praise, as wise, and as the best of daughters.

antistrophe 2

May I yet see thy life raised in might and wealth above thy foes, even as now it is humbled beneath their hand! For I have found thee

in no prosperous estate; and yet, for observance of nature's highest laws, winning the noblest renown, by thy piety towards Zeus.

(ORESTES *enters, with* PYLADES *and two attendants, one of them carrying a funeral urn.*)

ORESTES

Ladies, have we been directed aright, and are we on the right path to our goal?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And what seekest thou? With what desire hast thou come?

ORESTES

I have been searching for the home of Aegisthus.

LEADER

Well, thou hast found it; and thy guide is blameless.

ORESTES

Which of you, then, will tell those within that our company, long desired, hath arrived?

LEADER

This maiden,—if the nearest should announce it.

ORESTES

I pray thee, mistress, make it known in the house that certain men of Phocis seek Aegisthus.

ELECTRA

Ah, woe is me! Surely ye are not bringing the visible proofs of that rumour which we heard?

ORESTES

I know nothing of thy 'rumour'; but the aged Strophius charged me with tidings of Orestes.

ELECTRA

What are they, sir? Ah, how I thrill with fear!

ORESTES

He is dead; and in a small urn, as thou seest, we bring the scanty relics home.

ELECTRA

Ah me unhappy! There, at last, before mine eyes, I see that woful burden in your hands!

ORESTES

If thy tears are for aught which Orestes hath suffered, know that yonder vessel holds his dust.

ELECTRA

Ah, sir, allow me, then, I implore thee, if this urn indeed contains him, to take it in my hands,—that I may weep and wail, not for these ashes alone, but for myself and for all our house therewith!

ORESTES (*to the attendants*)

Bring it and give it her, whoe'er she be; for she who begs this boon must be one who wished him no evil, but a friend, or haply a kinswoman in blood.

(*The urn is placed in* ELECTRA'S *hands.*)

ELECTRA

Ah, memorial of him whom I loved best on earth! Ah, Orestes, whose life hath no relic left save this,—how far from the hopes with which I sent thee forth is the manner in which I receive thee back! Now I carry thy poor dust in my hands; but thou wert radiant, my child, when I sped thee forth from home! Would that I had yielded up my breath, ere, with these hands, I stole thee away, and sent thee to a strange land, and rescued thee from death; that so thou mightest have been stricken down on that self-same day, and had thy portion in the tomb of thy sire!

But now, an exile from home and fatherland, thou hast perished miserably, far from thy sister; woe is me, these loving hands have not washed or decked thy corpse, nor taken up, as was meet, their sad burden from the flaming pyre. No! at the hands of strangers, hapless one, thou hast had those rites, and so art come to us, a little dust in a narrow urn.

Ah, woe is me for my nursing long ago, so vain, that I oft bestowed on thee with loving toil! For thou wast never thy mother's darling so much as mine; nor was any in the house thy nurse but I; and by thee I was ever called 'sister.' But now all this hath vanished in a day, with thy death; like a whirlwind, thou hast swept all away with thee. Our father is gone; I am dead in regard to thee; thou thyself hast perished: our foes exult; that mother, who is none, is mad with joy,—she of whom thou didst oft send me secret messages, thy heralds, saying that thou thyself wouldst appear as an avenger. But our evil fortune, thine and mine, hath reft all that away, and hath sent thee forth unto me thus,—no more the form that I loved so well, but ashes and an idle shade.

Ah me, ah me! O piteous dust! Alas, thou dear one, sent on a dire journey, how hast undone me,—undone me indeed, O brother mine!

Therefore take me to this thy home, me who am as nothing, to thy nothingness, that I may dwell with thee henceforth below; for when thou

wert on earth, we shared alike; and now I fain would die, that I may not be parted from thee in the grave. For I see that the dead have rest from pain.

LEADER

Bethink thee, Electra, thou art the child of mortal sire, and mortal was Orestes; therefore grieve not too much. This is a debt which all of us must pay.

ORESTES

Alas, what shall I say? What words can serve me at this pass? I can restrain my lips no longer!

ELECTRA

What hath troubled thee? Why didst thou say that?

ORESTES

Is this the form of the illustrious Electra that I behold?

ELECTRA

It is; and very grievous is her plight.

ORESTES

Alas, then, for this miserable fortune!

ELECTRA

Surely, sir, thy lament is not for *me*?

ORESTES

O form cruelly, godlessly misused!

ELECTRA

Those ill-omened words, sir, fit no one better than me.

ORESTES

Alas for thy life, unwedded and all unblest!

ELECTRA

Why this steadfast gaze, stranger, and these laments?

ORESTES

How ignorant was I, then, of mine own sorrows!

ELECTRA

By what that hath been said hast thou perceived this?

ORESTES

By seeing thy sufferings, so many and so great.

ELECTRA
And yet thou seest but a few of my woes.

ORESTES
Could any be more painful to behold?

ELECTRA
This, that I share the dwelling of the murderers.

ORESTES
Whose murderers? Where lies the guilt at which thou hintest?

ELECTRA
My father's;—and then I am their slave perforce.

ORESTES
Who is it that subjects thee to this constraint?

ELECTRA
A mother—in name, but no mother in her deeds.

ORESTES
How doth she oppress thee? With violence or with hardship?

ELECTRA
With violence, and hardships, and all manner of ill.

ORESTES
And is there none to succour, or to hinder?

ELECTRA
None. I *had* one; and thou hast shown me his ashes.

ORESTES
Hapless girl, how this sight hath stirred my pity!

ELECTRA
Know, then, that thou art the first who ever pitied me.

ORESTES
No other visitor hath ever shared thy pain.

ELECTRA
Surely thou art not some unknown kinsman?

ORESTES
I would answer, if these were friends who hear us.

ELECTRA

Oh, they are friends; thou canst speak without mistrust.

ORESTES

Give up this urn, then, and thou shalt be told all.

ELECTRA

Nay, I beseech thee be not so cruel to me, sir!

ORESTES

Do as I say, and never fear to do amiss.

ELECTRA

I conjure thee, rob me not of my chief treasure!

ORESTES

Thou must not keep it.

ELECTRA

Ah woe is me for thee, Orestes, if I am not to give thee burial!

ORESTES

Hush!—no such word!—Thou hast no right to lament.

ELECTRA

No right to lament for my dead brother?

ORESTES

It is not meet for thee to speak of him thus.

ELECTRA

Am I so dishonoured of the dead?

ORESTES

Dishonoured of none:—but this is not thy part.

ELECTRA

Yes, if these are the ashes of Orestes that I hold.

ORESTES

They are not; a fiction clothed them with his name.
(*He gently takes the urn from her.*)

ELECTRA

And where is that unhappy one's tomb?

ORESTES

There is none; the living have no tomb.

ELECTRA

What sayest thou, boy?

ORESTES

Nothing that is not true.

ELECTRA

The man is alive?

ORESTES

If there be life in me.

ELECTRA

What? Art thou he?

ORESTES

Look at this signet, once our father's, and judge if I speak truth.

ELECTRA

O blissful day!

ORESTES

Blissful, in very deed!

ELECTRA

Is this thy voice?

ORESTES

Let no other voice reply.

ELECTRA

Do I hold thee in my arms?

ORESTES

As mayest thou hold me always!

ELECTRA

Ah, dear friends and fellow-citizens, behold Orestes here, who was feigned dead, and now, by that feigning hath come safely home!

LEADER

We see him, daughter; and for this happy fortune a tear of joy trickles from our eyes.

(*The following lines between* ORESTES *and* ELECTRA *are chanted responsively.*)

ELECTRA

strophe

Offspring of him whom I loved best, thou hast come even now, thou hast come, and found and seen her whom thy heart desired!

ORESTES

I am with thee;—but keep silence for a while.

ELECTRA

What meanest thou?

ORESTES

'Tis better to be silent, lest some one within should hear.

ELECTRA

Nay, by ever-virgin Artemis, I will never stoop to fear women, stay-at-homes, vain burdens of the ground!

ORESTES

Yet remember that in women, too, dwells the spirit of battle; thou hast had good proof of that, I ween.

ELECTRA

Alas! ah me! Thou hast reminded me of my sorrow, one which, from its nature, cannot be veiled, cannot be done away with, cannot forget!

ORESTES

I know this also; but when occasion prompts, then will be the moment to recall those deeds.

ELECTRA

antistrophe

Each moment of all time, as it comes, would be meet occasion for these my just complaints; scarcely now have I had my lips set free.

ORESTES

I grant it; therefore guard thy freedom.

ELECTRA

What must I do?

ORESTES

When the season serves not, do not wish to speak too much.

ELECTRA

Nay, who could fitly exchange speech for such silence, when thou hast appeared? For now I have seen thy face, beyond all thought and hope!

ORESTES

Thou sawest it, when the gods moved me to come. . . .[2]

ELECTRA

Thou hast told me of a grace above the first, if a god hath indeed brought thee to our house; I acknowledge therein the work of heaven.

ORESTES

I am loth, indeed, to curb thy gladness, but yet this excess of joy moves my fear.

ELECTRA

epode

O thou who, after many a year, hast deigned thus to gladden mine eyes by thy return, do not, now that thou hast seen me in all my woe—

ORESTES

What is thy prayer?

ELECTRA

—do not rob me of the comfort of thy face; do not force me to forego it!

ORESTES

I should be wroth, indeed, if I saw another attempt it.

ELECTRA

My prayer is granted?

ORESTES

Canst thou doubt?

ELECTRA

Ah, friends, I heard a voice that I could never have hoped to hear; nor could I have restrained my emotion in silence, and without a cry, when I heard it.

Ah me! But now I have thee; thou art come to me with the light of that dear countenance, which never, even in sorrow, could I forget.

(*The chant is concluded.*)

ORESTES

Spare all superfluous words; tell me not of our mother's wickedness, or how Aegisthus drains the wealth of our father's house by lavish luxury or aimless waste; for the story would not suffer thee to keep due limit. Tell me rather that which will serve our present need,—where we must show ourselves, or wait in ambush, that this our coming may confound the triumph of our foes.

And look that our mother read not thy secret in thy radiant face, when we twain have advanced into the house, but make lament, as for the feigned disaster; for when we have prospered, then there will be leisure to rejoice and exult in freedom.

ELECTRA

Nay, brother, as it pleases thee, so shall be my conduct also; for all my joy is a gift from thee, and not mine own. Nor would I consent to win a great good for myself at the cost of the least pain to thee; for so should I ill serve the divine power that befriends us now.

But thou knowest how matters stand here, I doubt not: thou must have heard that Aegisthus is from home, but our mother within;—and fear not that she will ever see my face lit up with smiles; for mine old hatred of her hath sunk into my heart; and, since I have beheld thee, for very joy I shall never cease to weep. How indeed should I cease, who have seen thee come home this day, first as dead, and then in life? Strangely hast thou wrought on me; so that, if my father should return alive, I should no longer doubt my senses, but should believe that I saw him. Now, therefore, that thou hast come to me so wondrously, command me as thou wilt; for, had I been alone, I should have achieved one of two things,—a noble deliverance, or a noble death.

ORESTES

Thou hadst best be silent; for I hear some one within preparing to go forth.

ELECTRA (*to* ORESTES *and* PYLADES)

Enter, sirs; especially as ye bring that which no one could repulse from these doors, though he receive it without joy.

(*The* PAEDAGOGUS *enters from the palace.*)

PAEDAGOGUS

Foolish and senseless children! Are ye weary of your lives, or was there no wit born in you, that ye see not how ye stand, not on the brink, but in the very midst of deadly perils? Nay, had I not kept watch this long while at these doors, your plans would have been in the house before yourselves; but, as it is, my care shielded you from that. Now have done with this

long discourse, these insatiate cries of joy, and pass within; for in such deeds delay is evil, and 'tis well to make an end.

ORESTES

What, then, will be my prospects when I enter?

PAEDAGOGUS

Good; for thou art secured from recognition.

ORESTES

Thou hast reported me, I presume, as dead?

PAEDAGOGUS

Know that here thou art numbered with the shades.

ORESTES

Do they rejoice, then, at these tidings? Or what say they?

PAEDAGOGUS

I will tell thee at the end; meanwhile, all is well for us on their part,—even that which is not well.

ELECTRA

Who is this, brother? I pray thee, tell me.

ORESTES

Dost thou not perceive?

ELECTRA

I cannot guess.

ORESTES

Knowest thou not the man to whose hands thou gavest me once?

ELECTRA

What man? How sayest thou?

ORESTES

By whose hands, through thy forethought, I was secretly conveyed forth to Phocian soil.

ELECTRA

Is this he in whom, alone of many, I found a true ally of old, when our sire was slain?

ORESTES

'Tis he; question me no further.

ELECTRA

O joyous day! O sole preserver of Agamemnon's house, how hast thou come? Art thou he indeed, who didst save my brother and myself from many sorrows? O dearest hands; O messenger whose feet were kindly servants! How couldst thou be with me so long, and remain unknown, nor give a ray of light, but afflict me by fables, while possessed of truths most sweet? Hail, father,—for 'tis a father that I seem to behold! All hail, —and know that I have hated thee, and loved thee, in one day, as never man before!

PAEDAGOGUS

Enough, methinks; as for the story of the past, many are the circling nights, and days as many, which shall show it thee, Electra, in its fulness. (*To* ORESTES *and* PYLADES) But this is my counsel to you twain, who stand there—now is the time to act; now Clytemnestra is alone,—no man is now within: but, if ye pause, consider that ye will have to fight, not with the inmates alone, but with other foes more numerous and better skilled.

ORESTES

Pylades, this our task seems no longer to crave many words, but rather that we should enter the house forthwith,—first adoring the shrines of my father's gods, who keep these gates.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter the palace, followed by the* PAEDAGOGUS.—ELECTRA *remains outside.*)

ELECTRA

O King Apollo! graciously hear them, and hear me besides, who so oft have come before thine altar with such gifts as my devout hand could bring! And now, O Lycean Apollo, with such vows as I can make, I pray thee, I supplicate, I implore, grant us thy benignant aid in these designs, and show men how impiety is rewarded by the gods!

(ELECTRA *enters the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Behold how Ares moves onward, breathing deadly vengeance, against which none may strive!

Even now the pursuers of dark guilt have passed beneath yon roof, the hounds which none may flee. Therefore the vision of my soul shall not long tarry in suspense.

The champion of the spirits infernal is ushered with stealthy feet into the house, the ancestral palace of his sire, bearing keen-edged death in his hands; and Hermes, son of Maia, who hath shrouded the

guile in darkness, leads him forward, even to the end, and delays no more.

(ELECTRA *enters from the palace.*)

ELECTRA

strophe

Ah, dearest friends, in a moment the men will do the deed;—but wait in silence.

CHORUS

How is it?—what do they now?

ELECTRA

She is decking the urn for burial, and those two stand close to her.

CHORUS

And why hast thou sped forth?

ELECTRA

To guard against Aegisthus entering before we are aware.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

Alas! Woe for the house forsaken of friends and filled with murderers!

ELECTRA

A cry goes up within:—hear ye not, friends?

CHORUS

I heard, ah me, sounds dire to hear, and shuddered!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

O hapless that I am!—Aegisthus, where, where art thou?

ELECTRA

Hark, once more a voice resounds!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

My son, my son, have pity on thy mother!

ELECTRA

Thou hadst none for him, nor for the father that begat him.

CHORUS

Ill-fated realm and race, now the fate that hath pursued thee day by day is dying,—is dying!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

Oh, I am smitten!

ELECTRA

Smite, if thou canst, once more!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

Ah, woe is me again!

ELECTRA

Would that the woe were for Aegisthus too!

CHORUS

The curses are at work; the buried live; blood flows for blood, drained from the slayers by those who died of yore.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter from the palace.*)

antistrophe

Behold, they come! That red hand reeks with sacrifice to Ares; nor can I blame the deed.

ELECTRA

Orestes, how fare ye?

ORESTES

All is well within the house, if Apollo's oracle spake well.

ELECTRA

The guilty one is dead?

ORESTES

Fear no more that thy proud mother will ever put thee to dishonour.

CHORUS

Cease; for I see Aegisthus full in view.

ELECTRA

Rash boys, back, back!

ORESTES

Where see ye the man?

ELECTRA

Yonder, at our mercy, he advances from the suburb, full of joy.

CHORUS

Make with all speed for the vestibule; that, as your first task prospered, so this again may prosper now.

ORESTES

Fear not,—we will perform it.

ELECTRA

Haste, then, whither thou wouldst.

ORESTES

See, I am gone.

ELECTRA

I will look to matters here.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *go back into the palace.*)

CHORUS

'Twere well to soothe his ear with some few words of seeming gentleness, that he may rush blindly upon the struggle with his doom.

(AEGISTHUS *enters.*)

AEGISTHUS

Which of you can tell me, where are those Phocian strangers, who, 'tis said, have brought us tidings of Orestes slain in the wreck of his chariot? Thee, thee I ask, yes, thee, in former days so bold,—for methinks it touches thee most nearly; thou best must know, and best canst tell.

ELECTRA

I know assuredly; else were I a stranger to the fortune of my nearest kinsfolk.

AEGISTHUS

Where then may be the strangers? Tell me.

ELECTRA

Within; they have found a way to the heart of their hostess.

AEGISTHUS

Have they in truth reported him dead?

ELECTRA

Nay, not reported only; they have shown him.

AEGISTHUS

Can I, then, see the corpse with mine own eyes?

ELECTRA

Thou canst, indeed; and 'tis no enviable sight.

AEGISTHUS

Indeed, thou hast given me a joyful greeting, beyond thy wont.

ELECTRA

Joy be thine, if in these things thou findest joy.

AEGISTHUS

Silence, I say, and throw wide the gates, for all Mycenaeans and Argives to behold; that, if any of them were once buoyed on empty hopes from this man, now, seeing him dead, they may receive my curb, instead of waiting till my chastisement make them wise perforce!

ELECTRA

No loyalty is lacking on my part; time hath taught me the prudence of concord with the stronger.

(*The central doors of the palace are thrown open and a shrouded corpse is disclosed.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *stand near it.*)

AEGISTHUS

O Zeus, I behold that which hath not fallen save by the doom of jealous Heaven; but, if Nemesis attend that word, be it unsaid!

Take all the covering from the face, that kinship, at least, may receive the tribute of lament from me also.

ORESTES

Lift the veil thyself; not my part this, but thine, to look upon these relics, and to greet them kindly.

AEGISTHUS

'Tis good counsel, and I will follow it.—(*To* ELECTRA) But thou—call me Clytemnestra, if she is within.

ORESTES

Lo, she is near thee: turn not thine eyes elsewhere.

(AEGISTHUS *removes the face-cloth from the corpse.*)

AEGISTHUS

O, what sight is this!

ORESTES

Why so scared? Is the face so strange?

AEGISTHUS

Who are the men into whose mid toils I have fallen, hapless that I am?

ORESTES

Nay, hast thou not discovered ere now that the dead, as thou miscallest them, are living?

AEGISTHUS

Alas, I read the riddle: this can be none but Orestes who speaks to me!

ORESTES

And, though so good a prophet, thou wast deceived so long?

AEGISTHUS

Oh lost, undone! Yet suffer me to say one word . . .

ELECTRA

In heaven's name, my brother, suffer him not to speak further, or to plead at length! When mortals are in the meshes of fate, how can such respite avail one who is to die? No,—slay him forthwith, and cast his corpse to the creatures from whom such as he should have burial, far from our sight! To me, nothing but this can make amends for the woes of the past.

ORESTES (*to* AEGISTHUS)

Go in, and quickly; the issue here is not of words, but of thy life.

AEGISTHUS

Why take me into the house? If this deed be fair, what need of darkness? Why is thy hand not prompt to strike?

ORESTES

Dictate not, but go where thou didst slay my father, that in the same place thou mayest die.

AEGISTHUS

Is this dwelling doomed to see all woes of Pelops' line, now, and in time to come?

ORESTES

Thine, at least; trust my prophetic skill so far.

AEGISTHUS

The skill thou vauntest belonged not to thy sire.

ORESTES

Thou bandiest words, and our going is delayed. Move forward!

AEGISTHUS

Lead thou.

ORESTES

Thou must go first.

AEGISTHUS

Lest I escape thee?

ORESTES

No, but that thou mayest not choose how to die; I must not spare thee any bitterness of death. And well it were if this judgment came straightway upon all who dealt in lawless deeds, even the judgment of the sword: so should not wickedness abound.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *drive* AEGISTHUS *into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

O house of Atreus, through how many sufferings hast thou come forth at last in freedom, crowned with good by this day's enterprise!

1. Jebb's note to this line points out that, according to the version of the legend which Sophocles is following, Agamemnon had four daughters, Iphigenia, who was sacrificed at Aulis, Electra, Chrysothemis, and Iphianassa. In other versions Iphigenia and Iphianassa are variant names for the same person.

2. A line has been lost here.

VI
PHILOCTETES

Characters in the Play

Ulysses, *King of Ithaca*
Neoptolemus, *son of Achilles*
Philoctetes, *son of Poeas and Companion of* Hercules
A Spy
Hercules
Chorus, *composed of the companions of* Ulysses *and* Neoptolemus

INTRODUCTION

THE *Philoctetes* was presented in 409 B.C. and received the first prize in the tragic contest in the spring of that year. Though written late in the poet's life, the play is among the greatest of his compositions. Both Aeschylus and Euripides also rendered in dramatic form the story of Philoctetes. These two plays are no longer extant, but through the writings of an ancient critic, who compared the three plays on the same subject composed by the three great tragedians, we know something about the Aeschylean and Euripidean versions. Furthermore the critic has given us his opinion that Sophocles' play surpassed in excellence the other two. Like *The Trachiniae*, it exhibits evidence of Euripidean influence, but in this instance the play has not suffered, but rather its quality has been enhanced.

The story of Philoctetes is found among the legends of the Trojan War. It seems that at Heracles' request Philoctetes, then a youth, lighted the funeral pyre of the hero, and in return for this service received Heracles' famed bow and arrows. Many years later, Philoctetes joined Agamemnon's host for the expedition against Troy. On the way to Troy an oracle commanded that certain sacrifices be made to Chrysa, a deity whose shrine was on a small island in the Aegean. Philoctetes alone of the expedition knew its whereabouts and therefore guided the Greeks to the spot. When they were preparing the sacrifice a serpent bit Philoctetes in the foot, and his cries of agony rendered it impossible to perform the sacrifice according to orthodox religious ritual. Furthermore, a foul stench which emanated from the wound made Philoctetes' presence intolerable to his companions. The commanders of the host, Agamemnon and Menelaus, solved the problem by ordering Odysseus (or Ulysses, as he is called in Francklin's translation) to place Philoctetes ashore on the uninhabited island of Lemnos. Here Philoctetes has remained in solitary suffering, inasmuch as his wound had never healed, eking out a painful existence, but still in possession of Heracles' bow. Meanwhile, at Troy the war was dragging on. Achilles and Ajax both were dead, and the Greek hopes were flagging. But then it was foretold that if Neoptolemus, Achilles' son, came to Troy, received his father's arms which were his

due, and if Philoctetes were rescued from Lemnos and brought to the Greek camp with Heracles' bow and arrows, Troy would be taken. Neoptolemus was accordingly sent for, presented with the arms, and accompanied Odysseus to Lemnos, from which he had been ordered to take Philoctetes. The play begins just after Odysseus and Neoptolemus have landed on the island.

There is no play among the Greek tragedies where a moral conflict or issue is more clearly or more forcefully presented than in the *Philoctetes*. Neoptolemus faces the problem of deciding between the conflicting claims of patriotism and of personal honour. Odysseus endeavours to convince his young companion that the end of serving his "nation," so to speak, justifies the use of any means, and hence appears as the quasi-villain of the piece. Philoctetes, quite apart from the conflict between the other two principal characters, faces his own set of problems. Sophocles draws him magnificently, bringing out in his character the effects of his physical suffering, the mental torture he has endured as well, his hatred for the Atreidae and Odysseus, his pride, and his pathetic craving to be rescued. It is interesting to note that, though Sophocles could have convincingly resolved the complications of his plot without using a *deus ex machina*, he has chosen to introduce Heracles at the conclusion in that capacity. That Philoctetes finally leaves with Neoptolemus and Odysseus in accordance with Heracles' orders, seems to reflect Sophocles' conviction that ultimately the divine exercises control over human affairs, though men bear their fair share in working out their own destinies. In essence, Sophocles seems here to restate the religious thesis which is fundamental to *Oedipus the King*.

PHILOCTETES

(SCENE:—*A lonely region on the shore of Lemnos, before a steep cliff in which is the entrance to* PHILOCTETES' *cave.* ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS *and an attendant enter.*)

ULYSSES

At length, my noble friend, thou bravest son
Of a brave father—father of us all,
The great Achilles—we have reached the shore
Of sea-girt Lemnos, desert and forlorn,
Where never tread of human step is seen,
Or voice of mortal heard, save his alone,
Poor Philoctetes, Poeas' wretched son,
Whom here I left; for such were my commands
From Grecia's chiefs, when by his fatal wound
Oppressed, his groans and execrations dreadful
Alarmed our hosts, our sacred rites profaned,
And interrupted holy sacrifice.
But why should I repeat the tale? The time
Admits not of delay. We must not linger,
Lest he discover our arrival here,
And all our purposed fraud to draw him hence
Be ineffectual. Lend me then thy aid.
Surveying round thee, canst thou see a rock
With double entrance—to the sun's warm rays
In winter open, and in summer's heat
Giving free passage to the welcome breeze?
A little to the left there is a fountain
Of living water, where, if yet he breathes,
He slakes his thirst. If aught thou seest of this
Inform me; so shall each to each impart
Counsel most fit, and serve our common cause.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*leaving* ULYSSES *a little behind him*)
If I mistake not, I behold a cave,
E'en such as thou describst.

ULYSSES
Dost thou? which way?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Yonder it is; but no path leading thither,
Or trace of human footstep.

ULYSSES
In his cell
A chance but he hath lain him down to rest;
Look if he hath not.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*advancing to the cave*)
Not a creature there.

ULYSSES
Nor food, nor mark of household preparation?

NEOPTOLEMUS
A rustic bed of scattered leaves.

ULYSSES
What more?

NEOPTOLEMUS
A wooden bowl, the work of some rude hand,
With a few sticks for fuel.

ULYSSES
This is all
His little treasure here.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Unhappy man!
Some linen for his wounds.

ULYSSES
This must be then
His place of habitation; far from hence
He cannot roam; distempered as he is,
It were impossible. He is but gone
A little way for needful food, or herb
Of power to 'suage and mitigate his pain.

Wherefore despatch this servant to some place
Of observation, whence he may espy
His every motion, lest he rush upon us.
There's not a Grecian whom his soul so much
Could wish to crush beneath him as Ulysses.
(*He makes a signal to the Attendant, who retires.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

He's gone to guard each avenue; and now,
If thou hast aught of moment to impart
Touching our purpose, say it; I attend.

ULYSSES

Son of Achilles, mark me well! Remember,
What we are doing not on strength alone,
Or courage, but on conduct will depend;
Therefore if aught uncommon be proposed,
Strange to thy ears and adverse to thy nature,
Reflect that 'tis thy duty to comply,
And act conjunctive with me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Well, what is it?

ULYSSES

We must deceive this Philoctetes; that
Will be thy task. When he shall ask thee who
And what thou art, Achilles' son reply—
Thus far within the verge of truth, no more.
Add that resentment fired thee to forsake
The Grecian fleet, and seek thy native soil,
Unkindly used by those who long with vows
Had sought thy aid to humble haughty Troy,
And when thou cam'st, ungrateful as they were,
The arms of great Achilles, thy just right,
Gave to Ulysses. Here thy bitter taunts
And sharp invectives liberally bestow
On me. Say what thou wilt, I shall forgive,
And Greece will not forgive thee if thou dost not;
For against Troy thy efforts are all vain
Without his arrows. Safely thou mayst hold
Friendship and converse with him, but I cannot.
Thou wert not with us when the war began,
Nor bound by solemn oath to join our host,

As I was; me he knows, and if he find
That I am with thee, we are both undone.
They must be ours then, these all-conquering arms;
Remember that. I know thy noble nature
Abhors the thought of treachery or fraud.
But what a glorious prize is victory!
Therefore be bold; we will be just hereafter.
Give to deceit and me a little portion
Of one short day, and for thy future life
Be called the holiest, worthiest, best of men.

NEOPTOLEMUS

What but to hear alarms my conscious soul,
Son of Laertes, I shall never practise.
I was not born to flatter or betray;
Nor I, nor he—the voice of fame reports—
Who gave me birth. What open arms can do
Behold me prompt to act, but ne'er to fraud
Will I descend. Sure we can more than match
In strength a foe thus lame and impotent.
I came to be a helpmate to thee, not
A base betrayer; and, O king! believe me,
Rather, much rather would I fall by virtue
Than rise by guilt to certain victory.

ULYSSES

O noble youth! and worthy of thy sire!
When I like thee was young, like thee of strength
And courage boastful, little did I deem
Of human policy; but long experience
Hath taught me, son, 'tis not the powerful arm,
But soft enchanting tongue that governs all.

NEOPTOLEMUS

And thou wouldst have me tell an odious falsehood?

ULYSSES

He must be gained by fraud.

NEOPTOLEMUS

By fraud? And why
Not by persuasion?

ULYSSES
He'll not listen to it;
And force were vainer still.

NEOPTOLEMUS
What mighty power
Hath he to boast?

ULYSSES
His arrows winged with death
Inevitable.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Then it were not safe
E'en to approach him.

ULYSSES
No; unless by fraud
He be secured.

NEOPTOLEMUS
And thinkst thou 'tis not base
To tell a lie then?

ULYSSES
Not if on that lie
Depends our safety.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Who shall dare to tell it
Without a blush?

ULYSSES
We need not blush at aught
That may promote our interest and success.

NEOPTOLEMUS
But where's the interest that should bias me?
Come he or not to Troy, imports it aught
To Neoptolemus?

ULYSSES
Troy cannot fall
Without his arrows.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Saidst thou not that I
Was destined to destroy her?

ULYSSES

Without them
Naught canst thou do, and they without thee nothing.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Then I must have them.

ULYSSES

When thou hast, remember
A double prize awaits thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS

What, Ulysses?

ULYSSES

The glorious names of valiant and of wise.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Away! I'll do it. Thoughts of guilt or shame
No more appal me.

ULYSSES

Wilt thou do it then?
Wilt thou remember what I told thee of?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Depend on 't; I have promised—that's sufficient.

ULYSSES

Here then remain thou; I must not be seen.
If thou stay long, I'll send a faithful spy,
Who in a sailor's habit well disguised
May pass unknown; of him, from time to time,
What best may suit our purpose thou shalt know.
I'll to the ship. Farewell! and may the god
Who brought us here, the fraudful Mercury,
And great Minerva, guardian of our country,
And ever kind to me, protect us still!

(ULYSSES *goes out as the* CHORUS *enters. The following lines are chanted responsively between* NEOPTOLEMUS *and the* CHORUS.)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Master, instruct us, strangers as we are,
What we may utter, what we must conceal.
Doubtless the man we seek will entertain
Suspicion of us; how are we to act?
To those alone belongs the art to rule
Who bear the sceptre from the hand of Jove;
To thee of right devolves the power supreme,
From thy great ancestors delivered down;
Speak then, our royal lord, and we obey.

NEOPTOLEMUS

systema 1

If you would penetrate yon deep recess
To seek the cave where Philoctetes lies,
Go forward; but remember to return
When the poor wanderer comes this way, prepared
To aid our purpose here if need require.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

O king! we ever meant to fix our eyes
On thee, and wait attentive to thy will;
But, tell us, in what part is he concealed?
'Tis fit we know the place, lest unobserved
He rush upon us. Which way doth it lie?
Seest thou his footsteps leading from the cave,
Or hither bent?

NEOPTOLEMUS (*advancing towards the cave*)

systema 2

Behold the double door
Of his poor dwelling, and the flinty bed.

CHORUS

And whither is its wretched master gone?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Doubtless in search of food, and not far off,
For such his manner is; accustomed here,
So fame reports, to pierce with winged arrows
His savage prey for daily sustenance,
His wound still painful, and no hope of cure.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Alas! I pity him. Without a friend,
Without a fellow-sufferer, left alone,
Deprived of all the mutual joys that flow
From sweet society—distempered too!
How can he bear it? O unhappy race
Of mortal man! doomed to an endless round
Of sorrows, and immeasurable woe!

antistrophe 2

Second to none in fair nobility
Was Philoctetes, of illustrious race;
Yet here he lies, from every human aid
Far off removed, in dreadful solitude,
And mingles with the wild and savage herd;
With them in famine and in misery
Consumes his days, and weeps their common fate,
Unheeded, save when babbling echo mourns
In bitterest notes responsive to his woe.

NEOPTOLEMUS

systema 3

And yet I wonder not; for if aright
I judge, from angry heaven the sentence came,
And Chrysa was the cruel source of all;
Nor doth this sad disease inflict him still
Incurable, without assenting gods?
For so they have decreed, lest Troy should fall
Beneath his arrows ere th' appointed time
Of its destruction come.

CHORUS

strophe 3

No more, my son!

NEOPTOLEMUS

What sayst thou?

CHORUS

Sure I heard a dismal groan
Of some afflicted wretch.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Which way?

CHORUS

E'en now
I hear it, and the sound as of some step
Slow-moving this way. He is not far from us.
His plaints are louder now.

antistrophe 3

Prepare, my son!

NEOPTOLEMUS

For what?

CHORUS

New troubles; for behold he comes!
Not like the shepherd with his rural pipe
And cheerful song, but groaning heavily.
Either his wounded foot against some thorn
Hath struck, and pains him sorely, or perchance
He hath espied from far some ship attempting
To enter this inhospitable port,
And hence his cries to save it from destruction.

(PHILOCTETES *enters, clad in rags. He moves with difficulty and is obviously suffering pain from his injured foot.*)

PHILOCTETES

Say, welcome strangers, what disastrous fate
Led you to this inhospitable shore,
Nor haven safe, nor habitation fit
Affording ever? Of what clime, what race?
Who are ye? Speak! If I may trust that garb,
Familiar once to me, ye are of Greece,
My much-loved country. Let me hear the sound
Of your long wished-for voices. Do not look
With horror on me, but in kind compassion
Pity a wretch deserted and forlorn
In this sad place. Oh! if ye come as friends,
Speak then, and answer—hold some converse with me,
For this at least from man to man is due.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Know, stranger, first what most thou seemst to wish;
We are of Greece.

PHILOCTETES

Oh! happiness to hear!
After so many years of dreadful silence,
How welcome was that sound! Oh! tell me, son,
What chance, what purpose, who conducted thee?
What brought thee thither, what propitious gale?
Who art thou? Tell me all—inform me quickly.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Native of Scyros, hither I return;
My name is Neoptolemus, the son
Of brave Achilles. I have told thee all.

PHILOCTETES

Dear is thy country, and thy father dear
To me, thou darling of old Lycomede;
But tell me in what fleet, and whence thou cam'st.

NEOPTOLEMUS

From Troy.

PHILOCTETES

From Troy? I think thou wert not with us
When first our fleet sailed forth.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Wert thou then there?
Or knowst thou aught of that great enterprise?

PHILOCTETES

Know you not then the man whom you behold?

NEOPTOLEMUS

How should I know whom I had never seen?

PHILOCTETES

Have you ne'er heard of me, nor of my name?
Hath my sad story never reached your ear?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Never.

PHILOCTETES

Alas! how hateful to the gods,
How very poor a wretch must I be then,
That Greece should never hear of woes like mine!
But they who sent me hither, they concealed them,

And smile triumphant, whilst my cruel wounds
Grow deeper still. O, sprung from great Achilles!
Behold before thee Poeas' wretched son,
With whom, a chance but thou hast heard, remain
The dreadful arrows of renowned Alcides,
E'en the unhappy Philoctetes—him
Whom the Atreidae and the vile Ulysses
Inhuman left, distempered as I was
By the envenomed serpent's deep-felt wound.
Soon as they saw that, with long toil oppressed,
Sleep had o'ertaken me on the hollow rock,
There did they leave me when from Chrysa's shore
They bent their fatal course; a little food
And these few rags were all they would bestow.
Such one day be their fate! Alas! my son,
How dreadful, thinkst thou, was that waking to me,
When from my sleep I rose and saw them not!
How did I weep! and mourn my wretched state!
When not a ship remained of all the fleet
That brought me here—no kind companion left
To minister or needful food or balm
To my sad wounds. On every side I looked,
And nothing saw but woe; of that indeed
Measure too full. For day succeeded day,
And still no comfort came; myself alone
Could to myself the means of life afford,
In this poor grotto. On my bow I lived:
The winged dove, which my sharp arrow slew,
With pain I brought into my little hut,
And feasted there; then from the broken ice
I slaked my thirst, or crept into the wood
For useful fuel; from the stricken flint
I drew the latent spark, that warms me still
And still revives. This with my humble roof
Preserve me, son. But, oh! my wounds remain.
Thou seest an island desolate and waste;
No friendly port nor hopes of gain to tempt,
Nor host to welcome in the traveller;
Few seek the wild inhospitable shore.
By adverse winds, sometimes th' unwilling guests,
As well thou mayst suppose, were hither driven;
But when they came, they only pitied me,
Gave me a little food, or better garb

To shield me from the cold; in vain I prayed
That they would bear me to my native soil,
For none would listen. Here for ten long years
Have I remained, whilst misery and famine
Keep fresh my wounds, and double my misfortune.
This have th' Atreidae and Ulysses done,
And may the gods with equal woes repay them!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O, son of Poeas! well might those, who came
And saw thee thus, in kind compassion weep;
I too must pity thee—I can no more.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I can bear witness to thee, for I know
By sad experience what th' Atreidae are,
And what Ulysses.

PHILOCTETES

Hast thou suffered then?
And dost thou hate them too?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Oh! that these hands
Could vindicate my wrongs! Mycenae then
And Sparta should confess that Scyros boasts
Of sons as brave and valiant as their own.

PHILOCTETES

O noble youth! But wherefore cam'st thou hither?
Whence this resentment?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I will tell thee all,
If I can bear to tell it. Know then, soon
As great Achilles died—

PHILOCTETES

Oh, stay, my son!
Is then Achilles dead?

NEOPTOLEMUS

He is, and not
By mortal hand, but by Apollo's shaft
Fell glorious.

PHILOCTETES

Oh! most worthy of each other,
The slayer and the slain! Permit me, son,
To mourn his fate, ere I attend to thine.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Alas! thou needst not weep for others' woes,
Thou hast enough already of thy own.

PHILOCTETES

'Tis very true; and therefore to thy tale.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Thus then it was. Soon as Achilles died,
Phoenix, the guardian of his tender years,
Instant sailed forth, and sought me out at Scyros;
With him the wary chief Ulysses came.
They told me then (or true or false I know not),
My father dead, by me, and me alone
Proud Troy must fall. I yielded to their prayers;
I hoped to see at least the dear remains
Of him whom living I had long in vain
Wished to behold. Safe at Sigeum's port
Soon we arrived. In crowds the numerous host
Thronged to embrace me, called the gods to witness
In me once more they saw their loved Achilles
To life restored; but he, alas! was gone.
I shed the duteous tear, then sought my friends
Th' Atreidae—friends I thought 'em!—claimed the arms
Of my dead father, and what else remained
His late possession: when—O cruel words!
And wretched I to hear them—thus they answered:
"Son of Achilles, thou in vain demandst
Those arms already to Ulysses given;
The rest be thine." I wept. "And is it thus,"
Indignant I replied, "ye dare to give
My right away?" "Know, boy," Ulysses cried,
"That right was mine, and therefore they bestowed
The boon on me: me who preserved the arms,
And him who bore them too." With anger fired
At this proud speech, I threatened all that rage
Could dictate to me if he not returned them.
Stung with my words, yet calm, he answered me:
"Thou wert not with us; thou wert in a place

Where thou shouldst not have been; and since thou meanst
To brave us thus, know, thou shalt never bear
Those arms with thee to Scyros; 'tis resolved."
Thus injured, thus deprived of all I held
Most precious, by the worst of men, I left
The hateful place, and seek my native soil.
Nor do I blame so much the proud Ulysses
As his base masters—army, city, all
Depend on those who rule. When men grow vile
The guilt is theirs who taught them to be wicked.
I've told thee all, and him who hates the Atreidae
I hold a friend to me and to the gods.

CHORUS (*singing*)

O Earth! thou mother of great Jove,
Embracing all with universal love,
Author benign of every good,
Through whom Pactolus rolls his golden flood!
To thee, whom in thy rapid car
Fierce lions draw, I rose and made my prayer—
To thee I made my sorrows known,
When from Achilles' injured son
Th' Atreidae gave the prize, that fatal day
When proud Ulysses bore his arms away.

PHILOCTETES

I wonder not, my friend, to see you here,
And I believe the tale; for well I know
The man who wronged you, know the base Ulysses
Falsehood and fraud dwell on his lips, and nought
That's just or good can be expected from him.
But strange it is to me that, Ajax present,
He dare attempt it.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Ajax is no more;
Had he been living, I had ne'er been spoiled
Thus of my right.

PHILOCTETES

Is he then dead?

NEOPTOLEMUS

He is.

PHILOCTETES

Alas! the son of Tydeus, and that slave,
Sold by his father Sisyphus, they live,
Unworthy as they are.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Alas! they do,
And flourish still.

PHILOCTETES

My old and worthy friend
The Pylian sage, how is he? He could see
Their arts, and would have given them better counsels.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Weighed down with grief he lives, but most unhappy,
Weeps his lost son, his dear Antilochus.

PHILOCTETES

O double woe! whom I could most have wished
To live and to be happy, those to perish!
Ulysses to survive! It should not be.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Oh! 'tis a subtle foe; but deepest plans
May sometimes fail.

PHILOCTETES

Where was Patroclus then,
Thy father's dearest friend?

NEOPTOLEMUS

He too was dead.
In war, alas—so fate ordains it ever—
The coward 'scapes, the brave and virtuous fall.

PHILOCTETES

It is too true; and now thou talkst of cowards,
Where is that worthless wretch, of readiest tongue,
Subtle and voluble?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Ulysses?

PHILOCTETES

No;
Thersites, ever talking, never heard.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I have not seen him, but I hear he lives.

PHILOCTETES

I did not doubt it: evil never dies;
The gods take care of that. If aught there be
Fraudful and vile, 'tis safe; the good and just
Perish unpitied by them. Wherefore is it?
When gods do ill, why should we worship them?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Since thus it is, since virtue is oppressed,
And vice triumphant, who deserve to live
Are doomed to perish, and the guilty reign.
Henceforth, O son of Poeas! far from Troy
And the Atreidae will I live remote.
I would not see the man I cannot love.
My barren Scyros shall afford me refuge,
And home-felt joys delight my future days.
So, fare thee well, and may th' indulgent gods
Heal thy sad wound, and grant thee every wish
Thy soul can form! Once more, farewell! I go,
The first propitious gale.

PHILOCTETES

What! now, my son?
So soon?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Immediately; the time demands
We should be near, and ready to depart.

PHILOCTETES

Now, by the memory of thy honoured sire,
By thy loved mother, by whate'er remains
On earth most dear to thee, oh! hear me now,
Thy suppliant! Do not, do not thus forsake me,
Alone, oppressed, deserted, as thou seest,
In this sad place. I shall, I know it must, be
A burthen to thee. But, oh! bear it kindly;
For ever doth the noble mind abhor
Th' ungenerous deed, and loves humanity;
Disgrace attends thee if thou dost forsake me,
If not, immortal fame rewards thy goodness.
Thou mayst convey me safe to Oeta's shores

In one short day; I'll trouble you no longer.
Hide me in any part where I may least
Molest you. Hear me! By the guardian god
Of the poor suppliant, all-protecting Jove,
I beg. Behold me at thy feet, infirm,
And wretched as I am, I clasp thy knees.
Leave me not here then, where there is no mark
Of human footstep—take me to thy home!
Or to Euboea's port, to Oeta, thence
Short is the way to Trachin, or the banks
Of Spercheius' gentle stream, to meet my father,
If yet he lives; for, oh! I begged him oft
By those who hither came, to fetch me hence—
Or is he dead, or they neglectful bent
Their hasty course to their own native soil.
Be thou my better guide! Pity and save
The poor and wretched. Think, my son, how frail
And full of danger is the state of man—
Now prosperous, now adverse. Who feels no ills
Should therefore fear them; and when fortune smiles
Be doubly cautious, lest destruction come
Remorseless on him, and he fall unpitied.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, pity him, my lord, for bitterest woes
And trials most severe he hath recounted;
Far be such sad distress from those I love!
Oh! if thou hat'st the base Atreidae, now
Revenge thee on them, serve their deadliest foe;
Bear the poor suppliant to his native soil;
So shalt thou bless thy friend, and 'scape the wrath
Of the just gods, who still protect the wretched.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Your proffered kindness, friends, may cost you dear;
When you shall feel his dreadful malady
Oppress you sore, you will repent it.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Never
Shall that reproach be ours.

NEOPTOLEMUS

In generous pity
Of the afflicted thus to be o'ercome

Were most disgraceful to me; he shall go.
May the kind gods speed our departure hence,
And guide our vessels to the wished-for shore!

PHILOCTETES

O happy hour! O kindest, best of men!
And you my dearest friends! how shall I thank you?
What shall I do to show my grateful heart?
Let us be gone! But, oh! permit me first
To take a last farewell of my poor hut,
Where I so long have lived. Perhaps you'll say
I must have had a noble mind to bear it.
The very sight to any eyes but mine
Were horrible, but sad necessity
At length prevailed, and made it pleasing to me.

LEADER

One from our ship, my lord, and with him comes
A stranger. Stop a moment till we hear
Their business with us.

(*The* SPY *enters, dressed as a merchant. He is accompanied by one of* NEOPTOLEMUS' *men.*)

SPY

Son of great Achilles,
Know, chance alone hath brought me hither, driven
By adverse winds to where thy vessels lay,
As home I sailed from Troy. There did I meet
This my companion, who informed me where
Thou mightst be found. Hence to pursue my course
And not to tell thee what concerns thee near
Had been ungenerous, thou perhaps meantime
Of Greece and of her counsels naught suspecting,
Counsels against thee not by threats alone
Or words enforced, but now in execution.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Now by my virtue, stranger, for thy news
I am much bound to thee, and will repay
Thy service. Tell me what the Greeks have done.

SPY

A fleet already sails to fetch thee back,
Conducted by old Phoenix, and the sons
Of valiant Theseus.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Come they then to force me?
Or am I to be won by their persuasion?

SPY

I know not that; you have what I could learn.

NEOPTOLEMUS

And did th' Atreidae send them?

SPY

Sent they are,
And will be with you soon.

NEOPTOLEMUS

But wherefore then
Came not Ulysses? Did his courage fail?

SPY

He, ere I left the camp, with Diomede
On some important embassy sailed forth
In search—

NEOPTOLEMUS

Of whom?

SPY

There was a man—but stay,
Who is thy friend here, tell me, but speak softly.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*whispering to him*)

The famous Philoctetes.

SPY

Ha! begone then!
Ask me no more—away, immediately!

PHILOCTETES

What do these dark mysterious whispers mean?
Concern they me, my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I know not what
He means to say, but I would have him speak
Boldly before us all, whate'er it be.

SPY

Do not betray me to the Grecian host,
Nor make me speak what I would fain conceal.
I am but poor—they have befriended me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

In me thou seest an enemy confest
To the Atreidae. This is my best friend
Because he hates them too; if thou art mine,
Hide nothing then.

SPY

Consider first.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I have.

SPY

The blame will be on you.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Why, let it be:
But speak, I charge thee.

SPY

Since I must then, know,
In solemn league combined, the bold Ulysses
And gallant Diomede have sworn by force
Or by persuasion to bring back thy friend:
The Grecians heard Laertes' son declare
His purpose; far more resolute he seemed
Than Diomede, and surer of success.

NEOPTOLEMUS

But why th' Atreidae, after so long time,
Again should wish to see this wretched exile,
Whence this desire? Came it from th' angry gods
To punish thus their inhumanity?

SPY

I can inform you; for perhaps from Greece
Of late you have not heard. There was a prophet,
Son of old Priam, Helenus by name,
Him, in his midnight walks, the wily chief
Ulysses, curse of every tongue, espied;
Took him, and led him captive, to the Greeks

A welcome spoil. Much he foretold to all,
And added last that Troy should never fall
Till Philoctetes from this isle returned.
Ulysses heard, and instant promise gave
To fetch him hence; he hoped by gentle means
To gain him; those successless, force at last
Could but compel him. He would go, he cried,
And if he failed his head should pay th' forfeit.
I've told thee all, and warn thee to be gone,
Thou and thy friend, if thou wouldst wish to save him.

PHILOCTETES

And does the traitor think he can persuade me?
As well might he persuade me to return
From death to life, as his base father did.

SPY

Of that I know not: I must to my ship.
Farewell, and may the gods protect you both!
(*The* SPY *departs.*)

PHILOCTETES

Lead me—expose me to the Grecian host!
And could the insolent Ulysses hope
With his soft flatteries e'er to conquer me?
No! Sooner would I listen to the voice
Of that fell serpent, whose envenomed tongue
Hath lamed me thus. But what is there he dare not
Or say or do? I know he will be here
E'en now, depend on't. Therefore, let's away!
Quick let the sea divide us from Ulysses.
Let us be gone; for well-timed expedition,
The task performed, brings safety and repose.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Soon as the wind permits us we embark,
But now 'tis adverse.

PHILOCTETES

Every wind is fair
When we are flying from misfortune.

NEOPTOLEMUS

True;
And 'tis against them too.

PHILOCTETES

Alas! no storms
Can drive back fraud and rapine from their prey.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I'm ready. Take what may be necessary,
And follow me.

PHILOCTETES

I want not much.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Perhaps
My ship will furnish you.

PHILOCTETES

There is a plant
Which to my wound gives some relief; I must
Have that.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Is there aught else?

PHILOCTETES

Alas! my bow
I had forgot. I must not lose that treasure.
(PHILOCTETES *steps into the cave, and brings out his bow and arrows.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

Are these the famous arrows then?

PHILOCTETES

They are.

NEOPTOLEMUS

And may I be permitted to behold,
To touch, to pay my adoration to them?

PHILOCTETES

In these, my son, in everything that's mine
Thou hast a right.

NEOPTOLEMUS

But if it be a crime,

I would not; otherwise——

PHILOCTETES

Oh! thou art full
Of piety; in thee it is no crime;
In thee, my friend, by whom alone I look
Once more with pleasure on the radiant sun—
By whom I live—who giv'st me to return
To my dear father, to my friends, my country:
Sunk as I was beneath my foes, once more
I rise to triumph o'er them by thy aid:
Behold them, touch them, but return them to me,
And boast that virtue which on thee alone
Bestowed such honour. Virtue made them mine.
I can deny thee nothing: he, whose heart
Is grateful can alone deserve the name
Of friend, to every treasure far superior.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Go in.

PHILOCTETES

Come with me; for my painful wound
Requires thy friendly hand to help me onward.
(*They go into the cave.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Since proud Ixion, doomed to feel
The tortures of th' eternal wheel,
Bound by the hand of angry Jove,
Received the due rewards of impious love;
Ne'er was distress so deep or woe so great
As on the wretched Philoctetes wait;
Who ever with the just and good,
Guiltless of fraud and rapine, stood,
And the fair paths of virtue still pursued;
Alone on this inhospitable shore,
Where waves for ever beat and tempests roar,
How could he e'er or hope or comfort know,
Or painful life support beneath such weight of woe?

antistrophe 1

Exposed to the inclement skies,
Deserted and forlorn he lies,
No friend or fellow-mourner there

To soothe his sorrows and divide his care,
Or seek the healing plant of power to 'suage
His aching wound and mitigate its rage;
But if perchance, awhile released
From torturing pain, he sinks to rest,
Awakened soon, and by sharp hunger prest,
Compelled to wander forth in search of food,
He crawls in anguish to the neighbouring wood;
Even as the tottering infant in despair
Who mourns an absent mother's kind supporting care.

strophe 2

The teeming earth, who mortals still supplies
With every good, to him her seed denies;
A stranger to the joy that flows
From the kind aid which man on man bestows;
Nor food, alas! to him was given,
Save when his arrows pierced the birds of heaven;
Nor e'er did Bacchus' heart-expanding bowl
For ten long years relieve his cheerless soul;
But glad was he his eager thirst to slake
In the unwholesome pool, or ever-stagnant lake.

antistrophe 2

But now, behold the joyful captive freed;
A fairer fate, and brighter days succeed:
For he at last hath found a friend
Of noblest race, to save and to defend,
To guide him with protecting hand,
And safe restore him to his native land;
On Spercheius' flowery banks to join the throng
Of Malian nymphs, and lead the choral song
On Oeta's top, which saw Alcides rise,
And from the flaming pile ascend his native skies.

(NEOPTOLEMUS *and* PHILOCTETES *enter from the cave.* PHILOCTETES *is suddenly seized with spasms of pain. He still holds in his hand the bow and arrows.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

Come, Philoctetes; why thus silent? Wherefore
This sudden terror on thee?

PHILOCTETES
Oh!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Whence is it?

PHILOCTETES
Nothing, my son; go on!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Is it thy wound
That pains thee thus?

PHILOCTETES
No; I am better now.
O gods!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Why dost thou call thus on the gods?

PHILOCTETES
To smile propitious, and preserve us—Oh!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Thou art in misery. Tell me—wilt thou not?
What is it?

PHILOCTETES
O my son! I can no longer
Conceal it from thee. Oh! I die, I perish;
By the great gods let me implore thee, now
This moment, if thou hast a sword, oh! strike,
Cut off this painful limb, and end my being!

NEOPTOLEMUS
What can this mean, that unexpected thus
It should torment thee?

PHILOCTETES
Know you not, my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS
What is the cause?

PHILOCTETES
Can you not guess it?

NEOPTOLEMUS

No.

PHILOCTETES

Nor I.

NEOPTOLEMUS

That's stranger still.

PHILOCTETES

My son, my son!

NEOPTOLEMUS

This new attack is terrible indeed!

PHILOCTETES

'Tis inexpressible! Have pity on me!

NEOPTOLEMUS

What shall I do?

PHILOCTETES

Do not be terrified,
And leave me. Its returns are regular,
And like the traveller, when its appetite
Is satisfied, it will depart. Oh! oh!

NEOPTOLEMUS

Thou art oppressed with ills on every side.
Give me thy hand. Come, wilt thou lean upon me?

PHILOCTETES

No; but these arrows take; preserve 'em for me.
A little while, till I grow better. Sleep
Is coming on me, and my pains will cease.
Let me be quiet. If meantime our foes
Surprise thee, let nor force nor artifice
Deprive thee of the great, the precious trust
I have reposed in thee; that were ruin
To thee, and to thy friend.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Be not afraid—
No hands but mine shall touch them; give them to me.

PHILOCTETES

Receive them, son; and let it be thy prayer
They bring not woes on thee, as they have done
To me and to Alcides.

(PHILOCTETES *gives him the bow and arrows.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

May the gods
Forbid it ever! May they guide our course
And speed our prosperous sails!

PHILOCTETES

Alas! my son,
I fear thy vows are vain. Behold my blood
Flows from the wound? Oh! how it pains me! Now
It comes, it hastens! Do not, do not leave me!
Oh! that Ulysses felt this racking torture,
E'en to his inmost soul! Again it comes!
O Agamemnon! Menelaus! why
Should not you bear these pangs as I have done?
O death! where art thou, death? so often called,
Wilt thou not listen? wilt thou never come?
Take thou the Lemnian fire, my generous friend,
Do me the same kind office which I did
For my Alcides. These are thy reward;
He gave them to me. Thou alone deservest
The great inheritance. What says my friend?
What says my dear preserver? Oh! where art thou?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I mourn thy hapless fate.

PHILOCTETES

Be of good cheer,
Quick my disorder comes, and goes as soon;
I only beg thee not to leave me here.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Depend on't, I will stay.

PHILOCTETES

Wilt thou indeed?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Trust me, I will.

PHILOCTETES
I need not bind thee to it
By oath.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Oh, no! 'twere impious to forsake thee.

PHILOCTETES
Give me thy hand, and pledge thy faith.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I do.

PHILOCTETES (*pointing up to heaven*)
Thither, oh, thither lead!

NEOPTOLEMUS
What sayst thou? where?

PHILOCTETES
Above——

NEOPTOLEMUS
What, lost again? Why lookst thou thus
On that bright circle?

PHILOCTETES
Let me, let me go!

NEOPTOLEMUS (*lays hold of him*)
Where wouldst thou go?

PHILOCTETES
Loose me.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I will not.

PHILOCTETES
Oh!
You'll kill me, if you do not.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*lets him go*)
There, then; now
Is thy mind better?

PHILOCTETES

Oh! receive me, earth!
Receive a dying man. Here must I lie;
For, oh! my pain's so great I cannot rise.
(PHILOCTETES *sinks down on the earth near the entrance of the cave.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

Sleep hath o'ertaken him. See, his head is lain
On the cold earth; the balmy sweat thick drops
From every limb, and from the broken vein
Flows the warm blood; let us indulge his slumbers.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Sleep, thou patron of mankind,
Great physician of the mind,
Who dost nor pain nor sorrow know,
Sweetest balm of every woe,
Mildest sovereign, hear us now;
Hear thy wretched suppliant's vow;
His eyes in gentle slumbers close,
And continue his repose;
Hear thy wretched suppliant's vow,
Great physician, hear us now.

And now, my son, what best may suit thy purpose
Consider well, and how we are to act.
What more can we expect? The time is come;
For better far is opportunity
Seized at the lucky hour than all the counsels
Which wisdom dictates or which craft inspires.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*chanting*)

He hears us not. But easy as it is
To gain the prize, it would avail us nothing
Were he not with us. Phoebus hath reserved
For him alone the crown of victory;
But thus to boast of what we could not do,
And break our word, were most disgraceful to us.

CHORUS (*singing*)

The gods will guide us, fear it not, my son;
But what thou sayst speak soft, for well thou knowst
The sick man's sleep is short. He may awake
And hear us; therefore let us hide our purpose.

If then thou thinkst as he does—thou knowst whom—
This is the hour. At such a time, my son,
The wisest err. But mark me, the wind's fair,
And Philoctetes sleeps, void of all help—
Lame, impotent, unable to resist,
He is as one among the dead. E'en now
We'll take him with us. 'Twere an easy task.
Leave it to me, my son. There is no danger.

NEOPTOLEMUS

No more! His eyes are open. See, he moves.

PHILOCTETES (*awaking*)

O fair returning light! beyond my hope;
You too, my kind preservers! O my son!
I could not think thou wouldst have stayed so long
In kind compassion to thy friend. Alas!
The Atreidae never would have acted thus.
But noble is thy nature, and thy birth,
And therefore little did my wretchedness,
Nor from my wounds the noisome stench deter
Thy generous heart. I have a little respite;
Help me, my son! I'll try to rise; this weakness
Will leave me soon, and then we'll go together.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I little thought to find thee thus restored.
Trust me, I joy to see thee free from pain,
And hear thee speak; the marks of death were on thee.
Raise thyself up; thy friends here, if thou wilt,
Shall carry thee, 'twill be no burthen to them
If we request it.

PHILOCTETES

No; thy hand alone;
I will not trouble them; 'twill be enough
If they can bear with me and my distemper
When we embark.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Well, be it so; but rise.

PHILOCTETES (*rising*)

Oh! never fear; I'll rise as well as ever.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*half to himself*)
How shall I act?

PHILOCTETES
What says my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Alas!
I know not what to say; my doubtful mind——

PHILOCTETES
Talked you of doubts? You did not surely.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Aye,
That's my misfortune.

PHILOCTETES
Is then my distress
The cause at last you will not take me with you?

NEOPTOLEMUS
All is distress and misery when we act
Against our nature and consent to ill.

PHILOCTETES
But sure to help a good man in misfortunes
Is not against thy nature.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Men will call me
A villain; that distracts me.

PHILOCTETES
Not for this;
For what thou meanst to do thou mayst deserve it.

NEOPTOLEMUS
What shall I do? Direct me, Jove! To hide
What I should speak, and tell a base untruth
Were double guilt.

PHILOCTETES
He purposes at last,
I fear it much, to leave me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Leave thee! No!
But how to make thee go with pleasure hence,
There I'm distressed.

PHILOCTETES

I understand thee not;
What means my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I can no longer hide
The dreadful secret from thee; thou art going
To Troy, e'en to the Greeks, to the Atreidae.

PHILOCTETES

Alas! what sayest thou?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Do not weep, but hear me.

PHILOCTETES

What must I hear? what wilt thou do with me?

NEOPTOLEMUS

First set thee free; then carry thee, my friend,
To conquer Troy.

PHILOCTETES

Is this indeed thy purpose?

NEOPTOLEMUS

This am I bound to do.

PHILOCTETES

Then am I lost,
Undone, betrayed. Canst thou, my friend, do this?
Give me my arms again.

NEOPTOLEMUS

It cannot be.
I must obey the powers who sent me hither;
Justice enjoins—the common cause demands it.

PHILOCTETES

Thou worst of men, thou vile artificer
Of fraud most infamous, what hast thou done?
How have I been deceived? Dost thou not blush

To look upon me, to behold me thus
Beneath thy feet imploring? Base betrayer!
To rob me of my bow, the means of life,
The only means—give 'em, restore 'em to me!
Do not take all! Alas! he hears me not,
Nor deigns to speak, but casts an angry look
That says I never shall be free again.
O mountains, rivers, rocks, and savage herds!
To you I speak—to you alone I now
Must breathe my sorrows; you are wont to hear
My sad complaints, and I will tell you all
That I have suffered from Achilles' son,
Who, bound by solemn oath to bear me hence
To my dear native soil, now sails for Troy.
The perjured wretch first gave his plighted hand,
Then stole the sacred arrows of my friend,
The son of Jove, the great Alcides; those
He means to show the Greeks, to snatch me hence
And boast his prize, as if poor Philoctetes,
This empty shade, were worthy of his arm.
Had I been what I was, he ne'er had thus
Subdued me, and e'en now to fraud alone
He owes the conquest. I have been betrayed!
Give me my arms again, and be thyself
Once more. Oh, speak! Thou wilt not? Then I'm lost.
O my poor hut! again I come to thee
Naked and destitute of food; once more
Receive me, here to die; for now, no longer
Shall my swift arrow reach the flying prey,
Or on the mountains pierce the wandering herd:
I shall myself afford a banquet now
To those I used to feed on—they the hunters,
And I their easy prey; so shall the blood
Which I so oft have shed be paid by mine;
And all this too from him whom once I deemed
Stranger to fraud nor capable of ill;
And yet I will not curse thee till I know
Whether thou still retainst thy horrid purpose,
Or dost repent thee of it; if thou dost not,
Destruction wait thee!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We attend your pleasure,
My royal lord, we must be gone; determine
To leave, or take him with us.

NEOPTOLEMUS

His distress
Doth move me much. Trust me, I long have felt
Compassion for him.

PHILOCTETES

Oh! then by the gods
Pity me now, my son, nor let mankind
Reproach thee for a fraud so base.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Alas!
What shall I do? Would I were still at Scyros!
For I am most unhappy.

PHILOCTETES

O my son!
Thou art not base by nature, but misguided
By those who are, to deeds unworthy of thee.
Turn then thy fraud on them who best deserve it;
Restore my arms, and leave me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Speak, my friends,
What's to be done?

(ULYSSES *enters suddenly.*)

ULYSSES

Ah! dost thou hesitate?
Traitor, be gone! Give me the arms.

PHILOCTETES

Ah me!
Ulysses here?

ULYSSES

Aye! 'tis Ulysses' self
That stands before thee.

PHILOCTETES

Then I'm lost, betrayed!
This was the cruel spoiler.

ULYSSES

Doubt it not.
'Twas I; I do confess it.

PHILOCTETES (*to* NEOPTOLEMUS)

O my son!
Give me them back.

ULYSSES

It must not be; with them
Thyself must go, or we shall drag thee hence.

PHILOCTETES

And will they force me? O thou daring villain!

ULYSSES

They will, unless thou dost consent to go.

PHILOCTETES

Wilt thou, O Lemnos! wilt thou, mighty Vulcan!
With thy all-conquering fire, permit me thus
To be torn from thee?

ULYSSES

Know, great Jove himself
Doth here preside. He hath decreed thy fate;
I but perform his will.

PHILOCTETES

Detested wretch,
Mak'st thou the gods a cover for thy crime?
Do they teach falsehood?

ULYSSES

No, they taught me truth,
And therefore, hence—that way thy journey lies.
(*Pointing to the sea*)

PHILOCTETES

It doth not.

ULYSSES

But I say it must be so.

PHILOCTETES

And Philoctetes then was born a slave!
I did not know it.

ULYSSES

No; I mean to place thee
E'en with the noblest, e'en with those by whom
Proud Troy must perish.

PHILOCTETES

Never will I go,
Befall what may, whilst this deep cave is open
To bury all my sorrows.

ULYSSES

What wouldst do?

PHILOCTETES

Here throw me down, dash out my desperate brains
Against this rock, and sprinkle it with my blood.

ULYSSES (*to the* CHORUS)

Seize, and prevent him!

(*They seize him.*)

PHILOCTETES

Manacled! O hands!
How helpless are you now! those arms, which once
Protected, thus torn from you! (*To* ULYSSES)
Thou abandoned,
Thou shameless wretch! from whom nor truth nor justice,
Naught that becomes the generous mind, can flow,
How hast thou used me! how betrayed! Suborned
This stranger, this poor youth, who, worthier far
To be my friend than thine, was only here
Thy instrument; he knew not what he did,
And now, thou seest, repents him of the crime
Which brought such guilt on him, such woes on me.
But thy foul soul, which from its dark recess
Trembling looks forth, beheld him void of art,
Unwilling as he was, instructed him,
And made him soon a master in deceit.
I am thy prisoner now; e'en now thou meanst
To drag me hence, from this unhappy shore,
Where first thy malice left me, a poor exile,
Deserted, friendless, and though living, dead
To all mankind. Perish the vile betrayer!
Oh! I have cursed thee often, but the gods
Will never hear the prayers of Philoctetes.

Life and its joys are thine, whilst I, unhappy,
Am but the scorn of thee, and the Atreidae,
Thy haughty masters. Fraud and force compelled thee,
Or thou hadst never sailed with them to Troy.
I lent my willing aid; with seven brave ships
I ploughed the main to serve them. In return
They cast me forth, disgraced me, left me here.
Thou sayst they did it; they impute the crime
To thee. And what will you do with me now?
And whither must I go? What end, what purpose
Could urge thee to it? I am nothing, lost
And dead already. Wherefore—tell me, wherefore?—
Am I not still the same detested burthen,
Loathsome and lame? Again must Philoctetes
Disturb your holy rites? If I am with you
How can you make libations? That was once
Your vile pretence for inhumanity.
Oh! may you perish for the deed! The gods
Will grant it sure, if justice be their care—
And that it is I know. You had not left
Your native soil to seek a wretch like me
Had not some impulse from the powers above,
Spite of yourselves, ordained it. O my country!
And you, O gods! who look upon this deed,
Punish, in pity to me, punish all
The guilty band! Could I behold them perish,
My wounds were nothing; that would heal them all.

LEADER (*to* ULYSSES)
Observe, my lord, what bitterness of soul
His words express; he bends not to misfortune,
But seems to brave it.

ULYSSES
I could answer him,
Were this a time for words; but now, no more
Than this—I act as best befits our purpose.
Where virtue, truth, and justice are required
Ulysses yields to none; I was not born
To be o'ercome, and yet submit to thee.
Let him remain. Thy arrows shall suffice;
We want thee not! Teucer can draw thy bow
As well as thou; myself with equal strength
Can aim the deadly shaft, with equal skill.

What could thy presence do? Let Lemnos keep thee.
Farewell! perhaps the honours once designed
For thee may be reserved to grace Ulysses.

PHILOCTETES
Alas! shall Greece then see my deadliest foe
Adorned with arms which I alone should bear?

ULYSSES
No more! I must be gone.

PHILOCTETES (*to* NEOPTOLEMUS)
Son of Achilles,
Thou wilt not leave me too? I must not lose
Thy converse, thy assistance.

ULYSSES (*to* NEOPTOLEMUS)
Look not on him;
Away, I charge thee! 'Twould be fatal to us.

PHILOCTETES (*to the* CHORUS)
Will you forsake me, friends? Dwells no compassion
Within your breasts for me?

LEADER (*pointing to* NEOPTOLEMUS)
He is our master;
We speak and act but as his will directs.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I know he will upbraid me for this weakness,
But 'tis my nature, and I must consent,
Since Philoctetes asks it. Stay you with him,
Till to the gods our pious prayers we offer,
And all things are prepared for our departure;
Perhaps, meantime, to better thoughts his mind
May turn relenting. We must go. Remember,
When we shall call you, follow instantly.

(NEOPTOLEMUS, *still with the bow in his hands, goes out with* ULYSSES. *The lines in the following scene between* PHILOCTETES *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

PHILOCTETES
O my poor hut! and is it then decreed
Again I come to thee to part no more,
To end my wretched days in this sad cave,

The scene of all my woes? For whither now
Can I betake me? Who will feed, support,
Or cherish Philoctetes? Not a hope
Remains for me. Oh! that th' impetuous storms
Would bear me with them to some distant clime!
For I must perish here.

CHORUS

Unhappy man!
Thou hast provoked thy fate; thyself alone
Art to thyself a foe, to scorn the good,
Which wisdom bids thee take, and choose misfortune.

PHILOCTETES

Wretch that I am, to perish here alone!
Oh! I shall see the face of man no more,
Nor shall my arrows pierce their wingèd prey,
And bring me sustenance! Such vile delusions
Used to betray me! Oh! that pains like those
I feel might reach the author of my woes!

CHORUS

The gods decreed it; we are not to blame.
Heap not thy curses therefore on the guiltless,
But take our friendship.

PHILOCTETES (*pointing to the sea-shore*)

I behold him there;
E'en now I see him laughing me to scorn
On yonder shore, and in his hands the darts
He waves triumphant, which no arms but these
Had ever borne. O my dear glorious treasure!
Hadst thou a mind to feel th' indignity,
How wouldst thou grieve to change thy noble master,
The friend of great Alcides, for a wretch
So vile, so base, so impious as Ulysses!

CHORUS

Justice will ever rule the good man's tongue,
Nor from his lips reproach and bitterness
Invidious flow. Ulysses, by the voice
Of Greece appointed, only sought a friend
To join the common cause, and serve his country.

PHILOCTETES

Hear me, ye winged inhabitants of air,
And you, who on these mountains love to feed,
My savage prey, whom once I could pursue;
Fearful no more of Philoctetes, fly
This hollow rock—I cannot hurt you now;
You need not dread to enter here. Alas!
You now may come, and in your turn regale
On these poor limbs, when I shall be no more.
Where can I hope for food? or who can breathe
This vital air, when life-preserving earth
No longer will assist him?

CHORUS

By the gods!
Let me entreat thee, if thou dost regard
Our master, and thy friend, come to him now,
Whilst thou mayst 'scape this sad calamity;
Who but thyself would choose to be unhappy
That could prevent it?

PHILOCTETES

Oh! you have brought back
Once more the sad remembrance of my griefs;
Why, why, my friends, would you afflict me thus?

CHORUS

Afflict thee—how?

PHILOCTETES

Think you I'll e'er return
To hateful Troy?

CHORUS

We would advise thee to it.

PHILOCTETES

I'll hear no more. Go, leave me!

CHORUS

That we shall
Most gladly. To the ships, my friends; away! (*Going*)
Obey your orders.

PHILOCTETES (*stops them*)
By protecting Jove,
Who hears the suppliant's prayer, do not forsake me!

CHORUS (*returning*)
Be calm then.

PHILOCTETES
O my friends! will you then stay?
Do, by the gods I beg you.

CHORUS
Why that groan?

PHILOCTETES
Alas! I die. My wound, my wound! Hereafter
What can I do? You will not leave me! Hear—

CHORUS
What canst thou say we do not know already?

PHILOCTETES
O'erwhelmed by such a storm of griefs as I am,
You should not thus resent a madman's frenzy.

CHORUS
Comply then and be happy.

PHILOCTETES
Never, never!
Be sure of that. Tho' thunder-bearing Jove
Should with his lightnings blast me, would I go?
No! Let Troy perish, perish all the host
Who sent me here to die; but, O my friends!
Grant me this last request.

CHORUS
What is it? Speak.

PHILOCTETES
A sword, a dart, some instrument of death.

CHORUS
What wouldst thou do?

PHILOCTETES

I'd hack off every limb.
Death, my soul longs for death.

CHORUS

But wherefore is it?

PHILOCTETES

I'll seek my father.

CHORUS

Whither?

PHILOCTETES

In the tomb;
There he must be. O Scyros! O my country!
How could I bear to see thee as I am—
I who had left thy sacred shores to aid
The hateful sons of Greece? O misery!
(*He goes into the cave.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*speaking*)

Ere now we should have taken thee to our ships,
But that advancing this way I behold
Ulysses, and with him Achilles' son.
(NEOPTOLEMUS *enters still carrying the bow; he is followed closely by* ULYSSES.)

ULYSSES

Why this return? Wherefore this haste?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I come
To purge me of my crimes.

ULYSSES

Indeed! What crimes?

NEOPTOLEMUS

My blind obedience to the Grecian host
And to thy counsels.

ULYSSES

Hast thou practised aught
Base or unworthy of thee?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Yes: by art
And vile deceit betrayed th' unhappy.

ULYSSES
Whom?
Alas! what mean you?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Nothing. But the son
Of Poeas—

ULYSSES
Ha! what wouldst thou do? My heart
Misgives me.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I have ta'en his arms, and now—

ULYSSES
Thou wouldst restore them! Speak! Is that thy purpose?
Almighty Jove!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Unjustly should I keep
Another's right?

ULYSSES
Now, by the gods, thou meanst
To mock me! Dost thou not?

NEOPTOLEMUS
If to speak truth
Be mockery.

ULYSSES
And does Achilles' son
Say this to me?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Why force me to repeat
My words so often to thee?

ULYSSES
Once to hear them
Is once indeed too much.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Doubt then no more,
For I have told thee all.

ULYSSES
There are, remember,
There are who may prevent thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Who shall dare
To thwart my purpose?

ULYSSES
All the Grecian host,
And with them, I.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Wise as thou art, Ulysses,
Thou talkst most idly.

ULYSSES
Wisdom is not thine
Either in word or deed.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Know, to be just
Is better far than to be wise.

ULYSSES
But where,
Where is the justice, thus unauthorized,
To give a treasure back thou ow'st to me,
And to my counsels?

NEOPTOLEMUS
I have done a wrong,
And I will try to make atonement for it.

ULYSSES
Dost thou not fear the power of Greece?

NEOPTOLEMUS
I fear
Nor Greece nor thee, when I am doing right.

ULYSSES
'Tis not with Troy then we contend, but thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I know not that.

ULYSSES

Seest thou this hand? behold,
It grasps my sword.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Mine is alike prepared,
Nor seeks delay.

ULYSSES

But I will let thee go;
Greece shall know all thy guilt, and shall revenge it.
(ULYSSES *departs.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

'Twas well determined; always be as wise
As now thou art, and thou mayst live in safety.
(*He approaches the cave and calls.*)
Ho! son of Poeas! Philoctetes, leave
Thy rocky habitation, and come forth.

PHILOCTETES (*from the cave*)

What noise was that? Who calls on Philoctetes?
(*He comes out.*)
Alas! what would you, strangers? Are you come
To heap fresh miseries on me?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Be of comfort,
And hear the tidings which I bring.

PHILOCTETES

I dare not;
Thy flattering tongue hath betrayed me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

And is there then no room for penitence?

PHILOCTETES

Such were thy words, when, seemingly sincere,
Yet meaning ill, thou stolst my arms away.

NEOPTOLEMUS

But now it is not so. I only came
To know if thou art resolute to stay,
Or sail with us.

PHILOCTETES

No more of that; 'tis vain
And useless all.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Art thou then fixed?

PHILOCTETES

I am;
It is impossible to say how firmly.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I thought I could have moved thee, but I've done.

PHILOCTETES

'Tis well thou hast; thy labour had been vain;
For never could my soul esteem the man
Who robbed me of my dearest, best possession,
And now would have me listen to his counsels—
Unworthy offspring of the best of men!
Perish th' Atreidae! perish first Ulysses!
Perish thyself!

NEOPTOLEMUS

Withhold thy imprecations,
And take thy arrows back.

PHILOCTETES

A second time
Wouldst thou deceive me?

NEOPTOLEMUS

By th' almighty power
Of sacred Jove I swear.

PHILOCTETES

O joyful sound!
If thou sayst truly.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Let my actions speak.
Stretch forth thy hand, and take thy arms again.
(*As* NEOPTOLEMUS *gives the bow and arrows to* PHILOCTETES, ULYSSES *suddenly enters.*)

ULYSSES
Witness ye gods! Here, in the name of Greece
And the Atreidae, I forbid it.

PHILOCTETES
Ha!
What voice is that? Ulysses'?

ULYSSES
Aye, 'tis I—
I who perforce will carry thee to Troy
Spite of Achilles' son.

PHILOCTETES
(*He aims an arrow directly at* ULYSSES.)
Not if I aim
This shaft aright.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*laying hold of him*)
Now, by the gods, I beg thee
Stop thy rash hand!

PHILOCTETES
Let go my arm.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I will not.

PHILOCTETES
Shall I not slay my enemy?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Oh, no!
'Twould cast dishonour on us both.
(ULYSSES *hastily departs.*)

PHILOCTETES
Thou knowst,
These Grecian chiefs are loud pretending boasters,
Brave but in tongue, and cowards in the field.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I know it; but remember, I restored
Thy arrows to thee, and thou hast no cause
For rage or for complaint against thy friend.

PHILOCTETES

I own thy goodness. Thou hast shown thyself
Worthy thy birth; no son of Sisyphus,
But of Achilles, who on earth preserved
A fame unspotted, and amongst the dead
Still shines superior, an illustrious shade.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Joyful I thank thee for a father's praise,
And for my own; but listen to my words,
And mark me well. Misfortunes, which the gods
Inflict on mortals, they perforce must bear:
But when, oppressed by voluntary woes,
They make themselves unhappy, they deserve not
Our pity or our pardon. Such art thou.
Thy savage soul, impatient of advice,
Rejects the wholesome counsel of thy friend,
And treats him like a foe; but I will speak,
Jove be my witness! Therefore hear my words,
And grave them in thy heart. The dire disease
Thou long hast suffered is from angry heaven,
Which thus afflicts thee for thy rash approach
To the fell serpent, which on Chrysa's shore
Watched o'er the sacred treasures. Know beside,
That whilst the sun in yonder east shall rise,
Or in the west decline, distempered still
Thou ever shalt remain, unless to Troy
Thy willing mind transport thee. There the sons
Of Aesculapius shall restore thee—there
By my assistance shalt thou conquer Troy.
I know it well; for that prophetic sage,
The Trojan captive Helenus, foretold
It should be so. "Proud Troy (he added then)
This very year must fall; if not, my life
Shall answer for the falsehood." Therefore yield.
Thus to be deemed the first of Grecians, thus
By Poeas' favourite sons to be restored,
And thus marked out the conqueror of Troy,
Is sure distinguished happiness.

PHILOCTETES

O life!
Detested, why wilt thou still keep me here?
Why not dismiss me to the tomb! Alas!

What can I do? How can I disbelieve
My generous friend? I must consent, and yet
Can I do this, and look upon the sun?
Can I behold my friends—will they forgive,
Will they associate with me after this?
And you, ye heavenly orbs that roll around me,
How will ye bear to see me linked with those
Who have destroyed me, e'en the sons of Atreus,
E'en with Ulysses, source of all my woes?
My sufferings past I could forget; but oh!
I dread the woes to come; for well I know
When once the mind's corrupted it brings forth
Unnumbered crimes, and ills to ills succeed.
It moves my wonder much that thou, my friend,
Shouldst thus advise me, whom it ill becomes
To think of Troy. I rather had believed
Thou wouldst have sent me far, far off from those
Who have defrauded thee of thy just right,
And gave thy arms away. Are these the men
Whom thou wouldst serve? whom thou wouldst thus compel me
To save and to defend? It must not be.
Remember, O my son! the solemn oath
Thou gav'st to bear me to my native soil.
Do this, my friend, remain thyself at Scyros,
And leave these wretches to be wretched still.
Thus shalt thou merit double thanks, from me
And from thy father; nor by succour given
To vile betrayers prove thyself as vile.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Thou sayst most truly. Yet confide in heaven,
Trust to thy friend, and leave this hated place.

PHILOCTETES

Leave it! For whom? For Troy and the Atreidae?
These wounds forbid it.

NEOPTOLEMUS

They shall all be healed,
Where I will carry thee.

PHILOCTETES

An idle tale
Thou tellst me, surely; dost thou not?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I speak
What best may serve us both.

PHILOCTETES

But, speaking thus,
Dost thou not fear th' offended gods?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Why fear them?
Can I offend the gods by doing good?

PHILOCTETES

What good? To whom? To me or to th' Atreidae?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I am thy friend, and therefore would persuade thee.

PHILOCTETES

And therefore give me to my foes.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Alas!
Let not misfortunes thus transport thy soul
To rage and bitterness.

PHILOCTETES

Thou wouldst destroy me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Thou knowst me not.

PHILOCTETES

I know th' Atreidae well,
Who left me here.

NEOPTOLEMUS

They did; yet they perhaps,
E'en they, O Philoctetes! may preserve thee.

PHILOCTETES

I never will to Troy.

NEOPTOLEMUS

What's to be done?
Since I can ne'er persuade thee, I submit;
Live on in misery.

PHILOCTETES

Then let me suffer;
Suffer I must; but, oh! perform thy promise:
Think on thy plighted faith, and guard me home
Instant, my friend, nor ever call back Troy
To my remembrance; I have felt enough
From Troy already.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Let us go; prepare!

PHILOCTETES

O glorious sound!

NEOPTOLEMUS

Bear thyself up.

PHILOCTETES

I will,
If possible.

NEOPTOLEMUS

But how shall I escape
The wrath of Greece?

PHILOCTETES

Oh! think not of it.

NEOPTOLEMUS

What
If they should waste my kingdom?

PHILOCTETES

I'll be there.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Alas! what canst thou do?

PHILOCTETES

And with these arrows
Of my Alcides—

NEOPTOLEMUS

Ha! What sayst thou?

PHILOCTETES

Drive
Thy foes before me. Not a Greek shall dare
Approach thy borders.

NEOPTOLEMUS

If thou wilt do this,
Salute the earth, and instant hence. Away!

(HERCULES *appears from above, and speaks as he moves forward.*)

HERCULES

Stay, son of Poeas! Lo to thee 'tis given
Once more to see and hear thy loved Alcides,
Who for thy sake hath left yon heavenly mansions,
And comes to tell thee the decrees of Jove;
To turn thee from the paths thou meanst to tread,
And guide thy footsteps right. Therefore attend.
Thou knowst what toils, what labours I endured,
Ere I by virtue gained immortal fame;
Thou too like me by toils must rise to glory—
Thou too must suffer, ere thou canst be happy;
Hence with thy friend to Troy, where honour calls,
Where health awaits thee—where, by virtue raised
To highest rank, and leader of the war,
Paris, its hateful author, shalt thou slay,
Lay waste proud Troy, and send thy trophies home,
Thy valour's due reward, to glad thy sire
On Oeta's top. The gifts which Greece bestows
Must thou reserve to grace my funeral pile,
And be a monument to after-ages
Of these all-conquering arms. Son of Achilles
(*Turning to* NEOPTOLEMUS)
(For now to thee I speak), remember this,
Without his aid thou canst not conquer Troy,
Nor Philoctetes without thee succeed;
Go then, and, like two lions in the field
Roaming for prey, guard ye each other well;
My Aesculapius will I send e'en now
To heal thy wounds. Then go, and conquer Troy;
But when you lay the vanquished city waste,
Be careful that you venerate the gods;
For far above all other gifts doth Jove,
Th' almighty father, hold true piety;

Whether we live or die, that still survives
Beyond the reach of fate, and is immortal.

PHILOCTETES (*chanting*)
Once more to let me hear that wished-for voice,
To see thee after so long time, was bliss
I could not hope for. Oh! I will obey
Thy great commands most willingly.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*chanting*)
And I.

HERCULES (*chanting*)
Delay not then. For lo! a prosperous wind
Swells in thy sail. The time invites. Adieu!
(HERCULES *disappears above.*)

PHILOCTETES (*chanting*)
I will but pay my salutations here,
And instantly depart. To thee, my cave,
Where I so long have dwelt, I bid farewell!
And you, ye nymphs, who on the watery plains
Deign to reside, farewell! Farewell the noise
Of beating waves, which I so oft have heard
From the rough sea, which by the black winds driven
O'erwhelmed me, shivering. Oft th' Hermaean mount
Echoed my plaintive voice, by wintry storms
Afflicted, and returned me groan for groan.
Now, ye fresh fountains, each Lycaean spring,
I leave you now. Alas! I little thought
To leave you ever. And thou sea-girt isle,
Lemnos, farewell! Permit me to depart
By thee unblamed, and with a prosperous gale
To go where fate demands, where kindest friends
By counsel urge me, where all-powerful Jove
In his unerring wisdom hath decreed.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Let us be gone, and to the ocean nymphs
Our humble prayers prefer, that they would all
Propitious smile, and grant us safe return.

NOTE ON PHILOCTETES

THOMAS FRANCKLIN, whose translation is printed herewith, was an English clergyman and Greek scholar of the eighteenth century. His translation of Sophocles, first published in 1759, has enjoyed an excellent reputation and is by far the best of the eighteenth century versions. Some of his renderings might by the captious critic be called too "free," yet the translations as a whole reproduce very well many of the essential qualities of the original. Francklin has followed the convention of his times in using the Roman forms of certain proper names. For example, Ulysses and Hercules appear throughout for Odysseus and Heracles.

VII
OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Characters in the Play

Oedipus
Antigone } *his daughters*
Ismene }
A Man of Colonus
Theseus, *King of Athens*
Creon, *of Thebes*
Polyneices, *the elder son of* Oedipus
A Messenger
Chorus of Elders of Colonus

INTRODUCTION

IN ALL probability the last play to come from the hand of Sophocles, the *Oedipus at Colonus* is regarded by many critics as his greatest work. The poet at the end of his life returns to the Theban saga in order to complete his interpretation of Oedipus' story. Perhaps inspired by a local legend that Oedipus was buried at Colonus where the Eumenides were worshipped, Sophocles makes the last hours and death of Oedipus the subject-matter of his play.

About twenty years have elapsed since the fatal day when the Theban king discovered the truth about himself and his past. At the close of *Oedipus the King,* Creon insisted that the oracle should decide what ought to be done with the ill-fated sovereign, who was pleading to be sent into exile. Evidently no oracle was consulted, for Oedipus continued to live in Thebes while Creon held the royal power as regent. As time passed Oedipus became adjusted to his position, and desired to spend his remaining years of life in his native city. But certain folk in the city felt that the presence of the ex-king still constituted a pollution in their land, and consequently, urged on by Creon, decreed that he should be exiled. His two sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, did nothing on their father's behalf to prevent the decree from being passed. So the aged Oedipus left Thebes, guided and cared for solely by his loyal daughter, Antigone.

After the departure of their father the two brothers at first seemed content to allow Creon to rule, but presently changed their view, and strove against each other for the throne. Eteocles conquered, and Polyneices, now an exile, went to Argos, married a daughter of the king, Adrastus, and as our play opens is on the point of leading an Argive host against Thebes, in an attempt to take the power from Eteocles. But now a new element in the situation has appeared. An oracle has reported to Thebes that she would prosper only if Oedipus lay buried in the Theban land, and that if he were interred in Attica, Athens would prosper and Thebes suffer. When the action of the play begins, the aged Oedipus possesses within him this strange power to render fortunate the land wherein his grave will lie.

Notable among the play's claims to distinction is the fact that in it

Sophocles reaches perhaps his greatest poetic heights. He has seen fit to use the *commos* more frequently than is normal. In addition he has incorporated in the choruses several brilliant lyric passages, the most famous of which is the great ode which sings the praises of Colonus and Attica (lines 668 ff.). Likewise the subordinate characters, as is usual with Sophocles, are excellently done. They are, however, individual to this play, and cannot be connected with their characterizations in Sophocles' other tragedies based on the Theban saga. For example, Creon here is a thorough-going scoundrel, whereas in the *Antigone,* he qualifies in many ways as an Aristotelian "tragic hero." This point, however, does not apply to the character of Oedipus which naturally rivets our attention. He still has many of his old familiar traits though he has clearly aged and become more gentle. Yet his intensity when he bitterly curses his sons carries us straight back to the times before his downfall.

Oedipus' characterization with its culmination in his mysterious death is most significant, because in it lies not only the larger meaning of this play, but also the terms in which Sophocles tends to resolve as finally as possible for himself the problems of moral responsibility and the nature of God's ways to man, those very issues with which he had been continually preoccupied throughout his creative career. Although Oedipus before his death has an unmitigated strain of hardness in his nature when he is faced with the conduct of his sons, nevertheless at the very end Sophocles presents a figure somehow or other mysteriously purified by his suffering. Within Oedipus now by the grace of some divine gift are the seeds of blessing. He has become a kind of vehicle through which the power behind the universe will act. In the intensely dramatic scene, immense in scope and impact, when Oedipus moves slowly from the stage, unguided, but lighted by an inward light, Sophoclean tragedy seems to sum itself up. Before us is a noble high-hearted man, who has suffered, though innocent in intention. He portrays man's dignity, the power of his will, his walking under God, the limits to which his understanding can attain—mystically illuminated at last in the triumph of death.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

(SCENE:—*At Colonus in Attica, a little more than a mile north-west of the Acropolis at Athens. The back-scene shows the grove sacred to the Erinyes or Furies, there worshipped under the propitiatory name of the Eumenides, or Kindly Powers. The grove is luxuriant with laurel, olive, and vine. Near the middle of the stage is seen a rock, affording a seat which is supposed to be just within the bounds of the grove. The hero Colonus is perhaps represented by a statue on the stage.*

The blind OEDIPUS, *who is conceived as coming into Attica from the west or north-west, enters on the spectators' left, led by* ANTIGONE. *He is old and way-worn, his haggard face bearing the traces of the self-inflicted wounds. The garb of both the wanderers betokens indigence and hardship. After replying to his first questions, his daughter leads him to the rocky seat.*)

OEDIPUS

DAUGHTER of the blind old man, to what region have we come, Antigone, or what city of men? Who will entertain the wandering Oedipus to-day with scanty gifts? Little crave I, and win yet less than that little, and therewith am content; for patience is the lesson of suffering, and of the years in our long fellowship, and lastly of a noble mind.—My child, if thou seest any resting-place, whether on profane ground or by groves of the gods, stay me and set me down, that we may inquire where we are: for we stand in need to learn as strangers of denizens, and to perform their bidding.

ANTIGONE

Father, toil-worn Oedipus, the towers that guard the city, to judge by sight, are far off; and this place is sacred, to all seeming,—thick-set with laurel, olive, vine; and in its heart a feathered choir of nightingales makes music. So sit thee here on this unhewn stone; thou hast travelled a long way for an old man.

OEDIPUS

Seat me, then, and watch over the blind.

ANTIGONE

If time can teach, I need not to learn that.

OEDIPUS

Canst thou tell me, now, where we have arrived?

ANTIGONE

Athens I know, but not this place.

OEDIPUS

Aye, so much every wayfarer told us.

ANTIGONE

Well, shall I go and learn how the spot is called?

OEDIPUS

Yes, child,—if indeed 'tis habitable.

ANTIGONE

Nay, inhabited it surely is;—but I think there is no need;—yonder I see a man near us.

OEDIPUS

Hitherward moving and setting forth?

ANTIGONE

Nay, he is at our side already. Speak as the moment prompts thee, for the man is here.

(*A* STRANGER, *a man of Colonus, enters.*)

OEDIPUS

Stranger, hearing from this maiden, who hath sight for herself and for me, that thou hast drawn nigh with timely quest for the solving of our doubts—

STRANGER

Now, ere thou question me at large, quit this seat; for thou art on ground which 'tis not lawful to tread.

OEDIPUS

And what is this ground? To what deity sacred?

STRANGER

Ground inviolable, whereon none may dwell: for the dread goddesses hold it, the daughters of Earth and Darkness.

OEDIPUS

Who may they be, whose awful name I am to hear and invoke?

STRANGER

The all-seeing Eumenides the folk here would call them: but other names please otherwhere.

OEDIPUS

Then graciously may they receive their suppliant! for nevermore will I depart from my rest in this land.

STRANGER

What means this?

OEDIPUS

'Tis the watchword of my fate.

STRANGER

Nay, for my part, I dare not remove thee without warrant from the city, ere I report what I am doing.

OEDIPUS

Now for the gods' love, stranger, refuse me not, hapless wanderer that I am, the knowledge for which I sue to thee.

STRANGER

Speak, and from me thou shalt find no refusal.

OEDIPUS

What, then, is the place that we have entered?

STRANGER

All that *I* know, thou shalt learn from my mouth. This whole place is sacred; awful Poseidon holds it, and therein is the fire-fraught god, the Titan Prometheus; but as for the spot whereon thou treadest, 'tis called the Brazen Threshold of this land, the stay of Athens; and the neighbouring fields claim yon knight Colonus for their primal lord, and all the people bear his name in common for their own. Such, thou mayest know, stranger, are these haunts, not honoured in story, but rather in the life that loves them.

OEDIPUS

Are there indeed dwellers in this region?

STRANGER

Yea, surely, the namesakes of yonder god.

OEDIPUS

Have they a king? Or doth speech rest with the folk?

STRANGER

These parts are ruled by the king in the city.

OEDIPUS

And who is thus sovereign in counsel and in might?

STRANGER

Theseus he is called, son of Aegeus who was before him.

OEDIPUS

Could a messenger go for him from among you?

STRANGER

With what aim to speak, or to prepare his coming?

OEDIPUS

That by small service he may find a great gain.

STRANGER

And what help can be from one who sees not?

OEDIPUS

In all that I speak there shall be sight.

STRANGER

Mark me now, friend—I would not have thee come to harm,—for thou art noble, if one may judge by thy looks, leaving thy fortune aside;—stay here, e'en where I found thee, till I go and tell these things to the folk on this spot,—not in the town: they will decide for thee whether thou shalt abide or retire.

(*The* STRANGER *departs.*)

OEDIPUS

My child, say, is the stranger gone?

ANTIGONE

He is gone, and so thou canst utter what thou wilt, father, in quietness, as knowing that I alone am near.

OEDIPUS

Queens of dread aspect, since your seat is the first in this land whereat I have bent the knee, show not yourselves ungracious to Phoebus or to myself; who, when he proclaimed that doom of many woes, spake of *this* as a rest for me after long years,—on reaching my goal in a land where I should find a seat of the Awful Goddesses, and a hospitable shelter,—even that there I should close my weary life, with benefits, through my having dwelt therein, for mine hosts, but ruin for those who sent me forth

—who drove me away. And he went on to warn me that signs of these things should come, in earthquake, or in thunder, haply, or in the lightning of Zeus.

Now I perceive that in this journey some faithful omen from you hath surely led me home to this grove: never else could I have met with you, first of all, in my wanderings,—I, the austere, with you who delight not in wine,—or taken this solemn seat not shaped by man.

Then, goddesses, according to the word of Apollo, give me at last some way to accomplish and close my course,—unless, perchance, I seem beneath your grace, thrall that I am evermore to woes the sorest on the earth. Hear, sweet daughters of primeval Darkness! Hear, thou that art called the city of great Pallas,—Athens, of all cities most honoured! Pity this poor wraith of Oedipus,—for verily 'tis the man of old no more.

ANTIGONE

Hush! Here come some aged men, I wot, to spy out thy resting-place.

OEDIPUS

I will be mute,—and do thou hide me in the grove, apart from the road, till I learn how these men will speak; for in knowledge is the safeguard of our course.

(OEDIPUS *and* ANTIGONE *withdraw into the grove. The* CHORUS OF ELDERS OF COLONUS *enter the orchestra, from the right of the spectators, as if in eager search.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Give heed—who was he, then? Where lodges he?—whither hath he rushed from this place, insolent, he, above all who live? Scan the ground, look well, urge the quest in every part.

A wanderer that old man must have been,—a wanderer, not a dweller in the land; else never would he have advanced into this untrodden grove of the maidens with whom none may strive, whose name we tremble to speak, by whom we pass with eyes turned away, moving our lips, without sound or word, in still devotion.

But now 'tis rumoured that one hath come who in no wise reveres them; and him I cannot yet discern, though I look round all the holy place, nor wot I where to find his lodging.

(OEDIPUS *steps forward, with* ANTIGONE, *from his place of concealment in the grove.*)

OEDIPUS

systema 1

Behold the man whom ye seek! for in sound is my sight, as the saying hath it.

CHORUS

O! O!
Dread to see, and dread to hear!

OEDIPUS

Regard me not, I entreat you, as a lawless one.

CHORUS

Zeus defend us! who may the old man be?

OEDIPUS

Not wholly of the best fortune, that ye should envy him, O guardians of this land!—'Tis plain: else would I not be walking thus by the eyes of others, and buoying my strength upon weakness.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Alas! wast thou sightless e'en from thy birth? Evil have been thy days, and many, to all seeming; but at least, if I can help, thou shalt not add this curse to thy doom. Too far thou goest—too far! But, lest thy rash steps intrude on the sward of yonder voiceless glade, where the bowl of water blends its stream with the flow of honied offerings (be thou well ware of such trespass, unhappy stranger) retire,—withdraw!—A wide space parts us: hearest thou, toil-worn wanderer? If thou hast aught to say in converse with us, leave forbidden ground, and speak where 'tis lawful for all; but, till then, refrain.

OEDIPUS

systema 2

Daughter, to what counsel shall we incline?

ANTIGONE

My father, we must conform us to the customs of the land, yielding, where 'tis meet, and hearkening.

OEDIPUS

Then give me thy hand.

ANTIGONE

'Tis laid in thine.

OEDIPUS

Strangers, oh let me not suffer wrong when I have trusted in you, and have passed from my refuge!

CHORUS

strophe 2

Never, old man, never shall any one remove thee from this place of rest against thy will.

(OEDIPUS *now begins to move forward.*)

OEDIPUS (*pausing in his gradual advance*)

Further, then?

CHORUS

Come still further.

OEDIPUS (*having advanced another step*)

Further?

CHORUS

Lead him onward, maiden, for thou understandest.

[*A verse for* ANTIGONE, *a verse for* OEDIPUS, *and then another verse for* ANTIGONE, *seem to have been lost here.*]

ANTIGONE

Come, follow me this way with thy dark steps, father, as I lead thee.

[*Here has been lost a verse for* OEDIPUS.]

CHORUS

A stranger in a strange land, ah, hapless one, incline thy heart to abhor that which the city holds in settled hate, and to reverence what she loves!

OEDIPUS

systema 3

Lead me thou, then, child, to a spot where I may speak and listen within piety's domain, and let us not wage war with necessity.

(*Moving forward, he now sets foot on a platform of rock at the verge of the grove.*)

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

There!—bend not thy steps beyond that floor of native rock.

OEDIPUS

Thus far?

CHORUS

Enough, I tell thee.

OEDIPUS

Shall I sit down?

CHORUS

Yea, move sideways and crouch low on the edge of the rock.

ANTIGONE

Father, this is my task: to quiet step.

OEDIPUS

Ah me! ah me!

ANTIGONE

Knit step, and lean thy aged frame upon my loving arm.

OEDIPUS

Woe for the doom of a dark soul!

(ANTIGONE *seats him on the rock.*)

CHORUS

Ah, hapless one, since now thou hast ease, speak,—whence art thou sprung? In what name art thou led on thy weary way? What is the fatherland whereof thou hast to tell us?

OEDIPUS

Strangers, I am an exile—but forbear . . .

CHORUS

What is this that thou forbiddest, old man?

OEDIPUS

—forbear, forbear to ask me who I am;—seek—probe—no further!

CHORUS

What means this?

OEDIPUS

Dread the birth . . .

CHORUS

Speak!

OEDIPUS (*to* ANTIGONE)

My child—alas!—what shall I say?

CHORUS

What is thy lineage, stranger,—speak!—and who thy sire?

OEDIPUS

Woe is me!—What will become of me, my child?

ANTIGONE

Speak,—for thou art driven to the verge.

OEDIPUS

Then speak I will—I have no way to hide it.

CHORUS

Ye twain make a long delay—come, haste thee!

OEDIPUS

Know ye a son of Laius . . . O! . . . (*The* CHORUS *utter a cry*) . . . and the race of the Labdacidae? . . .

CHORUS

O Zeus! . . .

OEDIPUS

The hapless Oedipus? . . .

CHORUS

THOU art he?

OEDIPUS

Have no fear of any words that I speak—

(*The* CHORUS *drown his voice with a great shout of execration, half turning away, and holding their mantels before their eyes.*)

OEDIPUS

Unhappy that I am! . . . (*The clamour of the* CHORUS *continues*) . . . Daughter, what is about to befall?

CHORUS

Out with you! forth from the land!

OEDIPUS

And thy promise—to what fulfilment wilt thou bring it?

CHORUS

No man is visited by fate if he requites deeds which were first done to himself; deceit on the one part matches deceits on the other, and gives pain, instead of benefit, for reward. And thou—back with

thee! out from these seats! avaunt! away from my land with all speed, lest thou fasten some heavier burden on my city!

ANTIGONE

Strangers of reverent soul, since ye have not borne with mine aged father,—knowing, as ye do, the rumour of his unpurposed deeds,—pity, at least, my hapless self, I implore you, who supplicate you for my sire alone,—supplicate you with eyes that can still look on your own, even as though I were sprung from your own blood, that the sufferer may find compassion.

On you, as on a god, we depend in our misery. Nay, hear us! grant the boon for which we scarce dare hope! By everything sprung from you that ye hold dear, I implore you, yea, by child—by wife, or treasure, or god! Look well and thou wilt not find the mortal who, if a god should lead him on, could escape.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, be thou sure, daughter of Oedipus, we pity thee and him alike for your fortune; but, dreading the judgment of the gods, we could not say aught beyond what hath now been said to thee.

OEDIPUS

What good comes, then, of repute or fair fame, if it ends in idle breath; seeing that Athens, as men say, has the perfect fear of Heaven, and the power, above all cities, to shelter the vexed stranger, and the power, above all, to succour him?

And where find I these things, when, after making me rise up from these rocky seats, ye then drive me from the land, afraid of my name alone? Not, surely, afraid of my person or of mine acts; since mine acts, at least, have been in suffering rather than doing—were it seemly that I should tell you the story of my mother or my sire, by reason whereof ye dread me—that know I full well.

And yet in *nature* how was I evil? I, who was but requiting a wrong, so that, had I been acting with knowledge, even then I could not be accounted wicked; but, as it was, all unknowing went I—whither I went—while they who wronged me knowingly sought my ruin.

Wherefore, strangers, I beseech you by the gods, even as ye made me leave my seat, so protect me, and do not, while ye honour the gods, refuse to give those gods their due; but rather deem that they look on the god-fearing among men, and on the godless, and that never yet hath escape been found for an impious mortal on the earth.

With the help of those gods, spare to cloud the bright fame of Athens by ministering to unholy deeds; but, as yet have received the suppliant

under your pledge, rescue me and guard me to the end; nor scorn me when ye look on this face unlovely to behold: for I have come to you as one sacred, and pious, and fraught with comfort for this people. But when the master is come, whosoever he be that is your chief, then shall ye hear and know all; meanwhile in no wise show yourself false.

LEADER

The thoughts urged on thy part, old man, must needs move awe; they have been set forth in words not light; but I am content that the rulers of our country should judge in this cause.

OEDIPUS

And where, strangers, is the lord of this realm?

LEADER

He is at the city of his father in our land; and the messenger who sent us hither hath gone to fetch him.

OEDIPUS

Think ye that he will have any regard or care for the blind man, so as to come hither himself?

LEADER

Yea, surely, so soon as he learns thy name.

OEDIPUS

Who is there to bring him that message?

LEADER

The way is long, and many rumours from wayfarers are wont to go abroad; when he hears them, he will soon be with us, fear not. For thy name, old man, hath been mightily noised through all lands; so that, even if he is taking his ease, and slow to move, when he hears of *thee* he will arrive with speed.

OEDIPUS

Well, may he come with a blessing to his own city, as to me!—What good man is not his own friend?

ANTIGONE

O Zeus! what shall I say, what shall I think, my father?

OEDIPUS

What is it, Antigone, my child?

ANTIGONE

I see a woman coming towards us, mounted on a colt of Etna; she wears a Thessalian bonnet to screen her face from the sun. What shall I say? Is it she, or is it not? Doth fancy cheat me? Yes—no—I cannot tell —ah me! It is no other—yes!—she greets me with bright glances as she draws nigh, and shows that Ismene, and no other, is before me.

OEDIPUS

What sayest thou, my child?

ANTIGONE

That I see thy daughter and my sister;—thou canst know her straightway by her voice.

(ISMENE *enters, attended by one servant.*)

ISMENE

Father and sister, names most sweet to me! How hardly have I found you! and now I scarce can see you for my tears.

OEDIPUS

My child, thou hast come?

ISMENE

Ah, father, sad is thy fate to see!

OEDIPUS

Thou art with us, my child!

ISMENE

And it hath cost me toil.

OEDIPUS

Touch me, my daughter!

ISMENE

I give a hand to each.

OEDIPUS

Ah, children—ah, ye sisters!

ISMENE

Alas, twice-wretched life!

OEDIPUS

Her life and mine?

ISMENE

And mine, hapless, with you twain.

OEDIPUS

Child, and why hast thou come?

ISMENE

Through care, father, for thee.

OEDIPUS

Through longing to see me?

ISMENE

Yes, and to bring thee tidings by mine own mouth,—with the only faithful servant that I had.

OEDIPUS

And where are the young men thy brothers at our need?

ISMENE

They are—where they are: 'tis their dark hour.

OEDIPUS

O, true image of the ways of Egypt that they show in their spirit and their life! For there the men sit weaving in the house, but the wives go forth to win the daily bread.[1] And in your case, my daughters, those to whom these toils belonged keep the house at home like girls, while ye, in their stead, bear your hapless father's burdens.

One, from the time when her tender age was past and she came to a woman's strength, hath ever been the old man's guide in weary wanderings, oft roaming, hungry and barefoot, through the wild wood, oft sore-vexed by rains and scorching heat,—but regarding not the comforts of home, if so her father should have tendance.

And thou, my child, in former days camest forth, bringing thy father, unknown of the Cadmeans, all the oracles that had been given touching Oedipus; and thou didst take on thee the office of a faithful watcher in my behalf, when I was being driven from the land. And now what new tidings hast thou brought thy father, Ismene? On what mission hast thou set forth from home? For thou comest not empty-handed, well I wot, or without some word of fear for me.

ISMENE

The sufferings that I bore, father, in seeking where thou wast living, I will pass by; I would not renew the pain in the recital. But the ills that now beset thine ill-fated sons,—'tis of these that I have come to tell thee.

At first it was their desire that the throne should be left to Creon, and the city spared pollution, when they thought calmly on the blight of the race from of old, and how it hath clung to thine ill-starred house. But

now, moved by some god and by a sinful mind, an evil rivalry hath seized them, thrice infatuate!—to grasp at rule and kingly power.

And the hot-brained youth, the younger born, hath deprived the elder, Polyneices, of the throne, and hath driven him from his fatherland.[2] But he, as the general rumour saith among us, hath gone, an exile, to the hill-girt Argos, and is taking unto him a new kinship, and warriors for his friends,—as deeming that Argos shall soon possess the Cadmean land in honour, or lift that land's praise to the stars.

These are no vain words, my father, but deeds terrible; and where the gods will have pity on thy griefs, I cannot tell.

OEDIPUS

What, hadst thou come to hope that the gods would ever look on me for my deliverance?

ISMENE

Yea, mine is that hope, father, from the present oracles.

OEDIPUS

What are they? What hath been prophesied, my child?

ISMENE

That thou shalt yet be desired, alive and dead, by the men of that land, for their welfare's sake.

OEDIPUS

And who could have good of such an one as I?

ISMENE

Their power, 'tis said, comes to be in *thy* hand.

OEDIPUS

When I am nought, in that hour, then, I am a man?

ISMENE

Yea, for the gods lift thee now, but before they were working thy ruin.

OEDIPUS

'Tis little to lift age, when youth was ruined.

ISMENE

Well, know, at least, that Creon will come to thee in this cause—and rather soon than late.

OEDIPUS

With what purpose, daughter? Expound to me.

ISMENE

To plant thee near the Cadmean land, so that they may have thee in their grasp, but thou mayest not set foot on their borders.

OEDIPUS

And how can I advantage them while I rest beyond their gates?

ISMENE

Thy tomb hath a curse for them, if all be not well with it.

OEDIPUS

It needs no god to help our wit so far.

ISMENE

Well, therefore they would fain acquire thee as a neighbour, in a place where thou shalt not be thine own master.

OEDIPUS

Will they also shroud me in Theban dust?

ISMENE

Nay, the guilt of a kinsman's blood debars thee, father.

OEDIPUS

Then never shall they become my masters.

ISMENE

Some day, then, this shall be a grief for the Cadmeans.

OEDIPUS

In what conjuncture of events, my child?

ISMENE

By force of thy wrath, when they take their stand at thy tomb.

OEDIPUS

And who hath told thee what thou tellest, my child?

ISMENE

Sacred envoys, from the Delphian hearth.

OEDIPUS

And Phoebus hath indeed spoken thus concerning me?

ISMENE

So say the men who have come back to Thebes.

OEDIPUS

Hath either of my sons, then, heard this?

ISMENE

Yea, both have heard, and know it well.

OEDIPUS

And then those base ones, aware of this, held the kingship dearer than the wish to recall me?

ISMENE

It grieves me to hear that,—but I must bear it.

OEDIPUS

Then may the gods quench not their fated strife, and may it become mine to decide this warfare whereto they are now setting their hands, spear against spear! For then neither should he abide who now holds the sceptre and the throne, nor should the banished one ever return; seeing that when I, their sire, was being thrust so shamefully from my country, they hindered not, nor defended me; no, they saw me sent forth homeless, they heard my doom of exile cried aloud.

Thou wilt say that it was mine own wish then, and that the city meetly granted me that boon. No, verily: for in that first day, when my soul was seething, and my darling wish was for death, aye, death by stoning, no one was found to help me in that desire: but after a time, when all my anguish was now assuaged, and when I began to feel that my wrath had run too far in punishing those past errors,—then it was that the city, on her part, went about to drive me perforce from the land—after all that time; and my sons, when they might have brought help—the sons to the sire—would not do it: no—for lack of one little word from them, I was left to wander, an outcast and a beggar evermore.

'Tis to these sisters, girls as they are, that, so far as nature enables them, I owe my daily food, and a shelter in the land, and the offices of kinship; the brothers have bartered their sire for a throne, and sceptred sway, and rule of the realm. Nay, never shall they win Oedipus for an ally, nor shall good ever come to them from this reign at Thebes; that know I, when I hear this maiden's oracles, and meditate on the old prophecies stored in mine own mind, which Phoebus hath fulfilled for me at last.

Therefore let them send Creon to seek me, and whoso beside is mighty in Thebes. For if ye, strangers,—with the championship of the dread goddesses who dwell among your folk,—are willing to succour, ye shall procure a great deliverer for this State, and troubles for my foes.

LEADER

Right worthy art thou of compassion, Oedipus, thou, and these maidens; and since to this plea thou addest thy power to save our land, I fain would advise thee for thy weal.

OEDIPUS

Kind sir, be sure, then, that I will obey in all,—stand thou my friend.

LEADER

Now make atonement to these deities, to whom thou hast first come, and on whose ground thou hast trespassed.

OEDIPUS

With what rites? instruct me, strangers.

LEADER

First, from a perennial spring fetch holy drink-offerings, borne in clean hands.

OEDIPUS

And when I have gotten this pure draught?

LEADER

Bowls there are, the work of a cunning craftsman: crown their edges and the handles at either brim.

OEDIPUS

With branches, or woollen cloths, or in what wise?

LEADER

Take the freshly-shorn wool of an ewe-lamb.

OEDIPUS

Good; and then,—to what last rite shall I proceed?

LEADER

Pour thy drink-offerings, with thy face to the dawn.

OEDIPUS

With these vessels whereof thou speakest shall I pour them?

LEADER

Yea, in three streams; but empty the last vessel wholly.

OEDIPUS

Wherewith shall I fill this, ere I set it? Tell me this also.

LEADER

With water and honey; but bring no wine thereto.

OEDIPUS

And when the ground under the dark shade hath drunk of these?

LEADER

Lay on it thrice nine sprays of olive with both thine hands, and make this prayer the while.

OEDIPUS

The prayer I fain would hear—'tis of chief moment.

LEADER

That, as we call them Benign Powers, with hearts benign they may receive the suppliant for saving: be this the prayer,—thine own, or his who prays for thee; speak inaudibly, and lift not up thy voice; then retire, without looking behind. Thus do, and I would be bold to stand by thee; but otherwise, stranger, I would fear for thee.

OEDIPUS

Daughters, hear ye these strangers, who dwell near?

ANTIGONE

We have listened; and do thou bid us what to do.

OEDIPUS

I cannot go; for I am disabled by lack of strength and lack of sight, evils twain. But let one of you two go and do these things. For I think that one soul suffices to pay this debt for ten thousand, if it come with good will to the shrine. Act, then, with speed; yet leave me not solitary; for the strength would fail me to move without help or guiding hand.

ISMENE

Then I will go to perform the rite; but where I am to find the spot—this I fain would learn.

LEADER

On the further side of this grove, maiden. And if thou hast need of aught, there is a guardian of the place, who will direct thee.

ISMENE

So to my task:—but thou, Antigone, watch our father here. In parents' cause, if toil there be, we must not reck of toil.

(ISMENE *departs.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 1

Dread is it, stranger, to arouse the old grief that hath so long been laid to rest: and yet I yearn to hear . . .

OEDIPUS

What now? . . .

CHORUS

—of that grievous anguish, found cureless, wherewith thou hast wrestled.

OEDIPUS

By thy kindness for a guest, bare not the shame that I have suffered!

CHORUS

Seeing, in sooth, that the tale is wide-spread, and in no wise wanes, I am fain, friend, to hear it aright.

OEDIPUS

Woe is me!

CHORUS

Be content, I pray thee!

OEDIPUS

Alas, alas!

CHORUS

Grant my wish, as I have granted thine in its fulness.

OEDIPUS

antistrophe 1

I have suffered misery, strangers,—suffered it through unwitting deeds, and of those acts—be Heaven my witness!—no part was of mine own choice.

CHORUS

But in what regard?

OEDIPUS

By an evil wedlock, Thebes bound me, all unknowing, to the bride that was my curse. . . .

CHORUS

Can it be, as I hear, that thou madest thy mother the partner of thy bed, for its infamy?

OEDIPUS

Woe is me! Cruel as death, strangers, are these words in mine ears; —but those maidens, begotten of me—

CHORUS

What wilt thou say?—

OEDIPUS

—two daughters—two curses—

CHORUS

O Zeus!

OEDIPUS

—sprang from the travail of the womb that bore me.

CHORUS

strophe 2

These, then, are at once thine offspring, and . . .

OEDIPUS

—yea, very sisters of their sire.

CHORUS

Oh, horror!

OEDIPUS

Horror indeed—yea, horrors untold sweep back upon my soul!

CHORUS

Thou hast suffered—

OEDIPUS

Suffered woes dread to bear.—

CHORUS

Thou hast sinned—

OEDIPUS

No wilful sin—

CHORUS

How?—

OEDIPUS

A gift was given to me—O, broken-hearted that I am, would I had never won from Thebes that meed for having served her!

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Wretch! How then? . . . thine hand shed blood? . . .

OEDIPUS

Wherefore this? What wouldst thou learn?

CHORUS

A father's blood?

OEDIPUS

Oh! oh! a second stab—wound on wound!

CHORUS

Slayer!

OEDIPUS

Aye, slayer—yet have I a plea—

CHORUS

What canst thou plead?—

OEDIPUS

—a plea in justice. . . .

CHORUS

What? . . .

OEDIPUS

Ye shall hear it; they whom I slew would have taken mine own life: stainless before the law, void of malice, have I come unto this pass!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lo, yonder cometh our prince, Theseus son of Aegeus, at thy voice, to do the part whereunto he was summoned.

(THESEUS *enters from the right of the spectators.*)

THESEUS

Hearing from many in time past concerning the cruel marring of thy sight, I have recognised thee, son of Laius; and now, through hearsay in this my coming, I have the fuller certainty. For thy garb, and that hapless face, alike assure me of thy name; and in all compassion would I ask thee, ill-fated Oedipus, what is thy suit to Athens or to me that thou hast taken thy place here, thou and the hapless maiden at thy side. Declare it; dire indeed must be the fortune told by thee, from which I should stand aloof; who know that I myself also was reared in exile, like to thine, and

in strange lands wrestled with perils to my life, as no man beside. Never, then, would I turn aside from a stranger, such as thou art now, or refuse to aid in his deliverance: for well know I that I am a man, and that in the morrow my portion is no greater than thine.

OEDIPUS

Theseus, thy nobleness hath in brief words shown such grace that for me there is need to say but little. Thou hast rightly said who I am, from what sire I spring, from what land I have come; and so nought else remains for me but to speak my desire,—and the tale is told.

THESEUS

Even so—speak that—I fain would hear.

OEDIPUS

I come to offer thee my woe-worn body as a gift,—not goodly to look upon; but the gains from it are better than beauty.

THESEUS

And what gain dost thou claim to have brought?

OEDIPUS

Hereafter thou shalt learn; not yet, I think.

THESEUS

At what time, then, will thy benefit be shown?

OEDIPUS

When I am dead, and thou hast given me burial.

THESEUS

Thou cravest life's last boon; for all between thou hast no memory,—or no care.

OEDIPUS

Yea, for by that boon I reap all the rest.

THESEUS

Nay, then, this grace which thou cravest from me hath small compass.

OEDIPUS

Yet give heed; this issue is no light one,—no, verily.

THESEUS

Meanest thou, as between thy sons and me?

OEDIPUS

King, they would fain convey me to Thebes.

THESEUS

But if to thy content, then for thee exile is not seemly.

OEDIPUS

Nay, when *I* was willing, *they* refused.

THESEUS

But, foolish man, temper in misfortune is not meet.

OEDIPUS

When thou hast heard my story, chide; till then, forbear.

THESEUS

Say on: I must not pronounce without knowledge.

OEDIPUS

I have suffered, Theseus, cruel wrong on wrong.

THESEUS

Wilt thou speak of the ancient trouble of thy race?

OEDIPUS

No, verily: *that* is noised throughout Hellas.

THESEUS

What, then, is thy grief that passeth the griefs of man?

OEDIPUS

Thus it is with me. From my country I have been driven by mine own offspring; and my doom is to return no more, as guilty of a father's blood.

THESEUS

How, then, should they fetch thee to them, if ye must dwell apart?

OEDIPUS

The mouth of the god will constrain them.

THESEUS

In fear of what woe foreshown?

OEDIPUS

That they must be smitten in this land.

THESEUS

And how should bitterness come between them and me?

OEDIPUS

Kind son of Aegeus, to the gods alone comes never old age or death, but all else is confounded by all-mastering time. Earth's strength decays, and the strength of the body; faith dies, distrust is born; and the same spirit is never steadfast among friends, or betwixt city and city; for, be it soon or be it late, men find sweet turn to bitter, and then once more to love.

And if now all is sunshine between Thebes and thee, yet time, in his untold course, gives birth to days and nights untold, wherein for a small cause they shall sunder with the spear that plighted concord of to-day; when my slumbering and buried corpse, cold in death, shall one day drink their warm blood, if Zeus is still Zeus, and Phoebus, the son of Zeus, speaks true.

But, since I would not break silence touching mysteries, suffer me to cease where I began; only make thine own word good, and never shalt thou say that in vain didst thou welcome Oedipus to dwell in this realm, —unless the gods cheat my hope.

LEADER

King, from the first yon man hath shown the mind to perform these promises, or the like, for our land.

THESEUS

Who, then, would reject the friendship of such an one?—to whom, first, the hearth of an ally is ever open, by mutual right, among us; and then he hath come as a suppliant to our gods, fraught with no light recompense for this land and for me. In reverence for these claims, I will never spurn his grace, but will establish him as a citizen in the land. And if it is the stranger's pleasure to abide here, I will charge you to guard him; or if to come with me be more pleasing,—this choice, or that, Oedipus, thou canst take; thy will shall be mine.

OEDIPUS

O Zeus, mayest thou be good unto such men!

THESEUS

What wouldst thou, then? wouldst thou come to my house?

OEDIPUS

Yea, were it lawful;—but *this* is the place—

THESEUS

What art thou to do here? I will not thwart thee . . .

OEDIPUS

—where I shall vanquish those who cast me forth.

THESEUS

Great were this promised boon from thy presence.

OEDIPUS

It shall be—if thy pledge is kept with me indeed.

THESEUS

Fear not touching me; never will I fail thee.

OEDIPUS

I will not bind thee with an oath, as one untrue.

THESEUS

Well, thou wouldst win nought more than by my word.

OEDIPUS

How wilt thou act, then?

THESEUS

What may be thy fear?

OEDIPUS

Men will come—

THESEUS

Nay, these will look to that.

OEDIPUS

Beware lest, if thou leave me—

THESEUS

Teach me not my part.

OEDIPUS

Fear constrains—

THESEUS

My heart feels not fear.

OEDIPUS

Thou knowest not the threats—

THESEUS

I know that none shall take thee hence in my despite. Oft have threats blustered, in men's wrath, with threatenings loud and vain; but when the mind is lord of himself once more, the threats are gone. And for yon men, haply,—aye, though they have waxed bold to speak dread things of bringing thee back,—the sundering waters will prove wide, and hard to

sail. Now I would have thee be of a good courage, apart from any resolve of mine, if indeed Phoebus hath sent thee on thy way; still, though I be not here, my name, I wot, will shield thee from harm.

(THESEUS *departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Stranger, in this land of goodly steeds thou hast come to earth's fairest home, even to our white Colonus; where the nightingale, a constant guest, trills her clear note in the covert of green glades, dwelling amid the wine-dark ivy and the god's inviolate bowers, rich in berries and fruit, unvisited by sun, unvexed by wind of any storm; where the reveller Dionysus ever walks the ground, companion of the nymphs that nursed him.

antistrophe 1

And, fed of heavenly dew, the narcissus blooms morn by morn with fair clusters, crown of the Great Goddesses from of yore; and the crocus blooms with golden beam. Nor fail the sleepless founts whence the waters of Cephisus wander, but each day with stainless tide he moveth over the plains of the land's swelling bosom, for the giving of quick increase; nor hath the Muses' quire abhorred this place, nor Aphrodite of the golden rein.

strophe 2

And a thing there is such as I know not by fame on Asian ground, or as ever born in the great Dorian isle of Pelops,—a growth unconquered, self-renewing, a terror to the spears of the foemen, a growth which mightily flourishes in this land,—the grey-leafed olive, nurturer of children. Youth shall not mar it by the ravage of his hand, nor any who dwells with old age; for the sleepless eye of the Morian [3] Zeus beholds it, and the grey-eyed Athena.

antistrophe 2

And another praise have I to tell for this the city our mother, the gift of a great god, a glory of the land most high; the might of horses, the might of young horses, the might of the sea.

For thou, son of Cronus, our lord Poseidon, hast throned her in this pride, since in these roads first thou didst show forth the curb that cures the rage of steeds. And the shapely oar, apt to men's hands, hath a wondrous speed on the brine, following the hundred-footed Nereids.

ANTIGONE

O land that art praised above all lands, now is it for thee to make those bright praises seen in deeds!

OEDIPUS

What new thing hath chanced, my daughter?

ANTIGONE

Yonder Creon draws near us,—not without followers, father.

OEDIPUS

Ah, kind elders, now give me, I pray you, the final proof of my safety!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Fear not—it shall be thine. If *I* am aged, this country's strength hath not grown old.

(CREON *enters with a train of attendants.*)

CREON

Sirs, noble dwellers in this land, I see that a sudden fear hath troubled your eyes at my coming; but shrink not from me, and let no ungentle word escape you.

I am here with no thought of force;—I am old, and I know that the city whereunto I have come is mighty, if any in Hellas hath might:—no,—I have been sent, in these my years, to plead with yonder man that he return with me to the land of Cadmus;—not one man's envoy am I, but with charge from our people all; since 'twas mine, by kinship, to mourn his woes as no Theban beside.

Nay, unhappy Oedipus, hear us, and come home! Rightfully art thou called by all the Cadmean folk, and in chief by me, even as I—unless I am the basest of all men born—chiefly sorrow for thine ills, old man, when I see thee, hapless one, a stranger and a wanderer evermore, roaming in beggary, with one handmaid for thy stay. Alas, I had not thought that she could fall to such a depth of misery as that whereunto she hath fallen —yon hapless girl!—while she ever tends thy dark life amid penury,—in ripe youth, but unwed,—a prize for the first rude hand.

Is it not a cruel reproach—alas!—that I have cast at thee, and me, and all our race? But indeed an open shame cannot be hid; then—in the name of thy fathers' gods, hearken to me, Oedipus!—hide it *thou*, by consenting to return to the city and the house of thy fathers, after a kindly farewell to this State,—for she is worthy: yet thine own hath the first claim on thy piety, since 'twas she that nurtured thee of old.

OEDIPUS

All-daring, who from any plea of right wouldst draw a crafty device, why dost thou attempt me thus, and seek once more to take me in the toils where capture would be sorest? In the old days—when, distempered by my self-wrought woes, I yearned to be cast out of the land—thy will went not with mine to grant the boon. But when my fierce grief had spent its force, and the seclusion of the house was sweet, *then* wast thou for thrusting me from the house and from the land—nor had this kinship any dearness for thee then; and now, again—when thou seest that I have kindly welcome from this city and from all her sons, thou seekest to pluck me away, wrapping hard thoughts in soft words. And yet what joy is there here,—in kindness shown to us against our will? As if a man should give thee no gift, bring thee no aid, when thou wast fain of the boon; but after thy soul's desire was sated, should grant it then, when the grace could be gracious no more: wouldst thou not find that pleasure vain? Yet such are thine own offers unto me,—good in name, but in their substance evil.

And I will declare it to these also, that I may show thee false. Thou hast come to fetch me, not that thou mayest take me home, but that thou mayest plant me near thy borders, and so thy city may escape unscathed by troubles from this land. *That* portion is not for thee, but *this*,—my curse upon the country, ever abiding therein;—and for my sons, this heritage—room enough in my realm wherein—to die.

Am I not wiser than thou in the fortunes of Thebes? Yea, wiser far, as truer are the sources of my knowledge, even Phoebus, and his father, Zeus most high. But thou hast come hither with fraud on thy lips, yea, with a tongue keener than the edge of the sword; yet by thy pleading thou art like to reap more woe than weal. Howbeit, I know that I persuade thee not of this,—go!—and suffer us to live here; for even in this plight our life would not be evil, so were we content therewith.

CREON

Which, thinkest thou, most suffers in this parley,—I by thy course, or thou by thine own?

OEDIPUS

For me, 'tis enough if thy pleading fails, as with me, so with yon men who are nigh.

CREON

Unhappy man, shall it be seen that not even thy years have brought thee wit? Must thou live to be the reproach of age?

OEDIPUS

Thou hast a ready tongue, but I know not the honest man who hath fair words for every cause.

CREON

Words may be many, and yet may miss their aim.

OEDIPUS

As if thine, forsooth, were few, but aimed aright.

CREON

No, truly, for one whose wit is such as thine.

OEDIPUS

Depart—for I will say it in the name of yon men also!—and beset me not with jealous watch in the place where I am destined to abide.

CREON

These men—not thee—call I to witness: but, as for the strain of thine answer to thy kindred, if ever I take thee—

OEDIPUS

And who could take me in despite of these allies?

CREON

I promise thee, thou soon shalt smart without that.

OEDIPUS

Where is the deed which warrants that blustering word?

CREON

One of thy two daughters hath just been seized by me, and sent hence, —the other I will remove forthwith.

OEDIPUS

Woe is me!

CREON

More woeful thou wilt find it soon.

OEDIPUS

Thou hast my child?

CREON

And will have this one ere long.

OEDIPUS

Alas! friends, what will ye do? Will ye forsake me? will ye not drive the godless man from this land?

LEADER

Hence, stranger, hence—begone! Unrighteous is thy present deed—unrighteous the deed which thou hast done.

CREON (*to his attendants*)

'Twere time for you to lead off yon girl perforce, if she will not go of her free will.

ANTIGONE

Wretched that I am! whither shall I fly?—where find help from gods or men?

LEADER (*threateningly, to* CREON)

What wouldst thou, stranger?

CREON

I will not touch yon man, but her who is mine.

OEDIPUS

O, elders of the land!

LEADER

Stranger,—thy deed is not just.

CREON

'Tis just.

LEADER

How just?

CREON

I take mine own.

(*He lays his hand on* ANTIGONE.)

OEDIPUS

strophe

Hear, O Athens!

CHORUS

What wouldst thou, stranger? Release her! Thy strength, and ours, will soon be proved.

(*They approach him with threatening gestures.*)

CREON

Stand back!

CHORUS

Not from thee, while this is thy purpose.

CREON

Nay, 'twill be war with Thebes for thee, if thou harm me.

OEDIPUS

Said I not so?

CHORUS

Unhand the maid at once!

CREON

Command not where thou art not master.

CHORUS

Leave hold, I tell thee!

CREON

(*to one of his guards, who at a signal seizes* ANTIGONE)

And I tell thee—begone!

CHORUS

To the rescue, men of Colonus—to the rescue! Athens—yea, Athens—is outraged with the strong hand! Hither, hither to our help!

ANTIGONE

They drag me hence—ah me!—friends, friends!

OEDIPUS (*blindly seeking for her*)

Where art thou, my child?

ANTIGONE

I am taken by force—

OEDIPUS

Thy hands, my child!—

ANTIGONE

Nay, I am helpless.

CREON (*to his guards*)

Away with you!

OEDIPUS

Ah me, ah me!

(*The guards lead* ANTIGONE *off.*)

CREON

So *those* two crutches shall never more prop thy steps. But since 'tis thy will to worst thy country and thy friends—whose mandate, though a prince, I here discharge—then be that victory thine. For hereafter, I wot, thou wilt come to know all this,—that now, as in time past, thou hast done thyself no good, when, in despite of friends, thou hast indulged anger, which is ever thy bane.

(*He turns to follow his guards.*)

LEADER

Hold, stranger!

CREON

Hands off, I say!

LEADER

I will not let thee go, unless thou give back the maidens.

CREON

Then wilt thou soon give Thebes a still dearer prize:—I will seize more than those two girls.

LEADER

What—whither wilt thou turn?

CREON

Yon man shall be my captive.

LEADER

A valiant threat!

CREON

'Twill forthwith be a deed.

LEADER

Aye, unless the ruler of this realm hinder thee.

OEDIPUS

Shameless voice! Wilt thou indeed touch me?

CREON

Be silent!

OEDIPUS

Nay, may the powers of this place suffer me to utter yet this curse! Wretch, who, when these eyes were dark, hast reft from me by force the helpless one who was mine eyesight! Therefore to thee and to thy race

may the Sun-god, the god who sees all things, yet grant an old age such as mine!

CREON

See ye this, people of the land?

OEDIPUS

They see both me and thee; they know that my wrongs are deeds, and my revenge—but breath.

CREON

I will not curb my wrath—nay, alone though I am, and slow with age, I'll take yon man by force.

(*He approaches* OEDIPUS *as if to seize him.*)

OEDIPUS

antistrophe

Woe is me!

CHORUS

'Tis a bold spirit that thou hast brought with thee, stranger, if thou thinkest to achieve this.

CREON

I do.

CHORUS

Then will I deem Athens a city no more.

CREON

In a just cause the weak vanquishes the strong.

OEDIPUS

Hear ye his words?

CHORUS

Yea, words which he shall not turn to deeds, Zeus knows!

CREON

Zeus haply knows—thou dost not.

CHORUS

Insolence!

CREON

Insolence which thou must bear.

CHORUS

What ho, people, rulers of the land, ho, hither with all speed, hither! These men are on their way to cross our borders!

(THESEUS *enters with his attendants in haste.*)

THESEUS

What means this shout? What is the trouble? What fear can have moved you to stay my sacrifice at the altar unto the sea-god, the lord of your Colonus? Speak, that I may know all, since therefore have I sped hither with more than easeful speed of foot.

OEDIPUS

Ah, friend,—I know thy voice,—yon man, but now, hath done me foul wrong.

THESEUS

What is that wrong? And who hath wrought it? Speak!

OEDIPUS

Creon, whom thou seest there, hath torn away from me my two children,—mine all.

THESEUS

What dost thou tell me?

OEDIPUS

Thou hast heard my wrong.

THESEUS (*to his attendants*)

Haste, one of you, to the altars yonder,—constrain the folk to leave the sacrifice, and to speed—footmen,—horsemen all, with slack rein,—to the region where the two highways meet, lest the maidens pass, and I become a mockery to this stranger, as one spoiled by force. Away, I tell thee—quick!—(*Some guards go out. Turning towards* CREON) As for yon man—if my wrath went as far as he deserves—I would not have suffered him to go scatheless from my hand. But now such law as he himself hath brought, and no other, shall be the rule for his correction.—(*Addressing* CREON) Thou shalt not quit this land until thou bring those maidens, and produce them in my sight; for thy deed is a disgrace to me, and to thine own race, and to thy country. Thou hast come unto a city that observes justice, and sanctions nothing without law,—yet thou hast put her lawful powers aside,—thou hast made this rude inroad,—thou art taking captives at thy pleasure, and snatching prizes by violence, as in the belief that my city was void of men, or manned by slaves, and I—a thing of nought.

Yet 'tis not by Theban training that thou art base; Thebes is not wont to rear unrighteous sons; nor would she praise thee, if she learned that thou art spoiling me,—yea, spoiling the gods, when by force thou leadest off their hapless suppliants. Now, were my foot upon thy soil, never would I wrest or plunder, without licence from the ruler of the land, whoso he might be—no, though my claim were of all claims most just: I should know how an alien ought to live among citizens. But thou art shaming a city that deserves it not, even thine own; and the fulness of thy years brings thee an old age bereft of wit.

I have said, then, and I say it once again—let the maidens be brought hither with all speed, unless thou wouldst sojourn in this land by no free choice;—and this I tell thee from my soul, as with my lips.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Seest thou thy plight, O stranger? Thou art deemed to come of a just race; but thy deeds are found evil.

CREON

Not counting this city void of manhood, son of Aegeus, nor of counsel, —as thou sayest,—have I wrought this deed; but because I judged that its folk could never be so enamoured of my kinsfolk as to foster them against my will. And I knew that this people would not receive a parricide,—a polluted man,—a man with whom had been found the unholy bride of her son. Such the wisdom, I knew, that dwells on the Mount of Ares in their land; which suffers not such wanderers to dwell within this realm. In that faith, I sought to take this prize. Nor had I done so, but that he was calling down bitter curses on me, and on my race; when, being so wronged, I deemed that I had warrant for this requital. For anger knows no old age, till death come; the dead alone feel no smart.

Therefore thou shalt act as seems to thee good; for, though my cause is just, the lack of aid makes me weak: yet, old though I am, I will endeavour to meet deed with deed.

OEDIPUS

O shameless soul, where, thinkest thou, falls this thy taunt,—on my age, or on thine own? Bloodshed—incest—misery—all this thy lips have launched against me,—all this that I have borne, woe is me! by no choice of mine: for such was the pleasure of the gods, wroth, haply, with the race from of old. Take me alone, and thou couldst find no sin to upbraid me withal, in quittance whereof I was driven to sin thus against myself and against my kin. Tell me, now,—if, by voice of oracle, some divine doom was coming on my sire, that he should die by a son's hand, how couldst thou justly reproach me therewith, who was then unborn,—whom no sire had yet begotten, no mother's womb conceived? And if, when born to woe

—as I was born—I met my sire in strife, and slew him, all ignorant what I was doing, and to whom,—how couldst thou justly blame the unknowing deed?

And my mother—wretch, hast thou no shame in forcing me to speak of her nuptials, when she was thy sister, and they such as I will now tell —for verily I will not be silent, when thou hast gone so far in impious speech. Yea, she was my mother,—oh, misery!—my mother,—I knew it not, nor she—and, for her shame, bare children to the son whom she had borne. But one thing, at least, I know,—that thy will consents thus to revile her and me; but not of my free will did I wed her, and not of free will do I speak now.

Nay, not in this marriage shall I be called guilty, nor in that slaying of my sire which thou ever urgest against me with bitter reviling. Answer me but one thing that I ask thee. If, here and now, one should come up and seek to slay thee—thee, the righteous—wouldst thou ask if the murderer was thy father, or wouldst thou reckon with him straightway? I think, as thou lovest thy life, thou wouldst requite the culprit, nor look around thee for thy warrant. But such the plight into which *I* came, led by gods; and in this, could my sire come back to life, methinks he would not gainsay me.

Yet *thou*,—for thou art not a just man, but one who holds all things meet to utter, knowing no barrier betwixt speech and silence—*thou* tauntest me in such wise, before yon men. And thou findest it timely to flatter the renowned Theseus, and Athens, saying how well her State hath been ordered: yet, while giving such large praise, thou forgettest this,—that if any land knows how to worship the gods with due rites, this land excels therein; whence thou hadst planned to steal me, the suppliant, the old man, and didst seek to seize me, and hast already carried off my daughters. Wherefore I now call on yon goddesses, I supplicate them, I adjure them with prayers, to bring me help and to fight in my cause, that thou mayest learn well by what manner of men this realm is guarded.

LEADER

The stranger is a good man, O king; his fate hath been accurst; but 'tis worthy of our succour.

THESEUS

Enough of words:—the doers of the deed are in flight, while we, the sufferers, stand still.

CREON

What, then, wouldst thou have a helpless man to do?

THESEUS

Show the way in their track,—while I escort thee,—that, if in these regions thou hast the maidens of our quest, thou thyself mayest discover them to me; but if thy men are fleeing with the spoil in their grasp, we may spare our trouble; the chase is for others, from whom they will never escape out of this land, to thank their gods.

Come,—forward! The spoiler hath been spoiled, I tell thee—Fate hath taken the hunter in the toils; gains got by wrongful arts are soon lost. And thou shalt have no ally in thine aim, for well wot I that not without accomplice or resource hast thou gone to such a length of violence in the daring mood which hath inspired thee here: no,—there was some one in whom thou wast trusting when thou didst essay these deeds. And to this I must look, nor make this city weaker than one man. Dost thou take my drift? Or seem these words as vain as seemed the warnings when thy deed was still a-planning?

CREON

Say what thou wilt while thou art here,—I will not cavil: but at home I, too, will know how to act.

THESEUS

For the present, threaten, but go forward.—Do thou, Oedipus, stay here in peace, I pray thee,—with my pledge that, unless I die before, I will not cease till I put thee in possession of thy children.

OEDIPUS

Heaven reward thee, Theseus, for thy nobleness, and thy loyal care in my behalf!

(THESEUS *and attendants, with* CREON, *go out on spectators' left.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Oh, to be where the foeman, turned to bay, will soon join in the brazen clangour of battle, haply by the shores loved of Apollo, haply by that torch-lit strand where the Great Goddesses cherish dread rites for mortals, on whose lips the ministrant Eumolpidae have laid the precious seal of silence; where, methinks, the war-waking Theseus and the captives twain, the sister maids, will soon meet within our borders, amid a war-cry of men strong to save!

antistrophe 1

Or perchance they will soon draw nigh to the pastures on the west of Oea's snowy rock, borne on horses in their flight, or in chariots racing at speed.

Creon will be worsted! Terrible are the warriors of Colonus, and the followers of Theseus are terrible in their might. Yea, the steel of every bridle flashes,—with slack bridle-rein all the knighthood rides apace that worships our Queen of Chivalry, Athena, and the earth-girdling Sea-god, the son of Rhea's love.

strophe 2

Is the battle now, or yet to be? For somehow my soul woos me to the hope that soon I shall be face to face with the maidens thus sorely tried, thus sorely visited by the hand of a kinsman.

To-day, to-day, Zeus will work some great thing: I have presage of victory in the strife. O to be a dove with swift strength as of the storm, that I might reach an airy cloud, with gaze lifted above the fray!

antistrophe 2

Hear, all-ruling lord of heaven, all-seeing Zeus! Enable the guardians of this land, in might triumphant, to achieve the capture that gives the prize to their hands! So grant thy daughter also, our dread Lady, Pallas Athena! And Apollo, the hunter, and his sister, who follows the dappled, swift-footed deer—fain am I that they should come, a twofold strength, to this land and to her people.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, wanderer friend, thou wilt not have to tax thy watcher with false augury,—for yonder I see the maidens drawing near with an escort.

OEDIPUS

Where—where? How? What sayest thou?

(ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE *enter, with* THESEUS *and his attendants, on the spectators' left.*)

ANTIGONE

O father, father, that some god would suffer thine eyes to see this noble man, who hath brought us here to thee!

OEDIPUS

My child!—ye are here indeed?

ANTIGONE

Yea, for these strong arms have saved us—Theseus, and his trusty followers.

OEDIPUS

Come ye hither, my child,—let me embrace you—restored beyond all hope!

ANTIGONE

Thy wish shall be granted—we crave what we bestow.

OEDIPUS

Where, then, where are ye?

ANTIGONE

Here approaching thee together.

OEDIPUS

My darlings!

ANTIGONE

A father loves his own.

OEDIPUS

Props of mine age!

ANTIGONE

And sharers of thy sorrow.

OEDIPUS

I hold my dear ones; and now, should I die, I were not wholly wretched, since ye have come to me. Press close to me on either side, children, cleave to your sire, and repose from this late roaming, so forlorn, so grievous! And tell me what hath passed as shortly as ye may; brief speech sufficeth for young maidens.

ANTIGONE

Here is our deliverer: from him thou shouldst hear the story, father, since his is the deed; so shall my part be brief.

OEDIPUS

Sir, marvel not, if with such yearning I prolong my words unto my children, found again beyond my hope. For well I wot that this joy in respect of them hath come to me from thee, and thee alone: thou hast rescued them, and no man beside. And may the gods deal with thee after my wish,—with thee, and with this land; for among you, above all human kind, have I found the fear of heaven, and the spirit of fairness, and the lips that lie not. I know these things, which with these words I requite; for what I have, I have through thee, and no man else.

Stretch forth thy right hand, O king, I pray thee, that I may touch it,

and, if 'tis lawful, kiss thy cheek.—But what am I saying? Unhappy as I have become, how could I wish thee to touch one with whom all stain of sin hath made its dwelling? No, not I,—nor allow thee, if thou wouldst. They alone can share this burden, to whom it hath come home.—Receive my greeting where thou standest; and in the future still give me thy loyal care, as thou hast given it to this hour.

THESEUS

No marvel is it to me, if thou hast shown some mind to large discourse, for joy in these thy children, and if thy first care hath been for their words, rather than for me; indeed, there is nought to vex me in that. Not in words so much as deeds would I make the lustre of my life. Thou hast the proof; I have failed in nothing of my sworn faith to thee, old man; here am I, with the maidens living,—yea, scatheless of those threats. And how the fight was won, what need that I should idly boast, when thou wilt learn it from these maidens in converse?

But there is a matter that hath newly chanced to me, as I came hither; lend me thy counsel thereon, for, small though it be, 'tis food for wonder; and mortal man should deem nothing beneath his care.

OEDIPUS

What is it, son of Aegeus? Tell me;—I myself know nought of that whereof thou askest.

THESEUS

A man, they say,—not thy countryman, yet thy kinsman,—hath somehow cast himself, a suppliant, at our altar of Poseidon, where I was sacrificing when I first set out hither.

OEDIPUS

Of what land is he? What craves he by the supplication?

THESEUS

I know one thing only; they say, he asks brief speech with thee, which shall not irk thee much.

OEDIPUS

On what theme? That suppliant posture is not trivial.

THESEUS

He asks, they say, no more than that he may confer with thee, and return unharmed from his journey hither.

OEDIPUS

Who can he be who thus implores the god?

THESEUS

Look if ye have any kinsman at Argos, who might crave this boon of thee.

OEDIPUS

O friend! Say no word more!

THESEUS

What ails thee?

OEDIPUS

Ask it not of me—

THESEUS

Ask what?—Speak!

OEDIPUS

By those words I know who is the suppliant.

THESEUS

And who can he be, against whom I should have a grief?

OEDIPUS

My son, O king,—the hated son whose words would vex mine ear as the words of no man beside.

THESEUS

What? Canst thou not listen, without doing what thou wouldst not? Why should it pain thee to hear him?

OEDIPUS

Most hateful, king, hath that voice become to his sire:—lay me not under constraint to yield in this.

THESEUS

But think whether his suppliant state constrains thee: what if thou hast a duty of respect for the god?

ANTIGONE

Father, hearken to me, though I be young who counsel. Allow the king to gratify his own heart, and to gratify the god as he wishes; and, for thy daughter's sake, allow our brother to come. For he will not pluck thee perforce from thy resolve,—never fear,—by such words as shall not be spoken for thy good. But to hear him speak,—what harm can be in that? Ill-devised deeds, thou knowest, are bewrayed by speech. Thou art his sire; so that, e'en if he were to wrong thee with the most impious of foul wrongs, my father, it is not lawful for thee to wrong him again.

Oh, let him come: other men, also, have evil offspring, and are swift to wrath; but they hear advice, and are charmed from their mood by the gentle spells of friends.

Look thou to the past, not to the present,—think on all that thou hast borne through sire and mother; and if thou considerest those things, well I wot, thou wilt discern how evil is the end that waits on evil wrath; not slight are thy reasons to think thereon, bereft, as thou art, of the sight that returns no more.

Nay, yield to us! It is not seemly for just suitors to sue long; it is not seemly that a man should receive good, and thereafter lack the mind to requite it.

OEDIPUS

My child, 'tis sore for me, this pleasure that ye win from me by your pleading;—but be it as ye will. Only, if that man is to come hither,—friend, let no one ever become master of my life!

THESEUS

I need not to hear such words more than once, old man:—I would not boast; but be sure that thy life is safe, while any god saves mine.

(THESEUS *goes out, to the right of the spectators.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Whoso craves the ampler length of life, not content to desire a modest span, him will I judge with no uncertain voice; he cleaves to folly.

For the long days lay up full many things nearer unto grief than joy; but as for thy delights, their place shall know them no more, when a man's life hath lapsed beyond the fitting term; and the Deliverer comes at the last to all alike,—when the doom of Hades is suddenly revealed, without marriage-song, or lyre, or dance,—even Death at the last.

antistrophe

Not to be born is, past all prizing, best; but, when a man hath seen the light, this is next best by far, that with all speed he should go thither, whence he hath come.

For when he hath seen youth go by, with its light follies, what troublous affliction is strange to his lot, what suffering is not therein? —envy, factions, strife, battles and slaughters; and, last of all, age claims him for her own,—age, dispraised, infirm, unsociable, unfriended, with whom all woe of woe abides.

epode

In such years is yon hapless one, not I alone: and as some cape that fronts the North is lashed on every side by the waves of winter, so he also is fiercely lashed evermore by the dread troubles that break on him like billows, some from the setting of the sun, some from the rising, some in the region of the noon-tide beam, some from the gloom-wrapped hills of the North.

ANTIGONE

Lo, yonder, methinks, I see the stranger coming hither,—yea, without attendants, my father,—the tears streaming from his eyes.

OEDIPUS

Who is he?

ANTIGONE

The same who was in our thoughts from the first;—Polyneices hath come to us.

(POLYNEICES *enters, on the spectators' left.*)

POLYNEICES

Ah me, what shall I do? Whether shall I weep first for mine own sorrows, sisters, or for mine aged sire's, as I see them yonder? Whom I have found in a strange land, an exile here with you twain, clad in such raiment, whereof the foul squalor hath dwelt with that aged form so long, a very blight upon his flesh,—while above the sightless eyes the unkempt hair flutters in the breeze; and matching with these things, meseems, is the food that he carries, hapless one, against hunger's pinch.

Wretch that I am! I learn all this too late: and I bear witness that I am proved the vilest of men in all that touches care for thee:—from mine own lips hear what I am. But, seeing that Zeus himself, in all that he doeth, hath Mercy for the sharer of his throne, may she come to thy side also, my father; for the faults can be healed, but can never more be made worse.

(*A pause*)

Why art thou silent? . . . Speak, father:—turn not away from me. Hast thou not even an answer for me? Wilt thou dismiss me in mute scorn, without telling wherefore thou art wroth?

O ye, his daughters, sisters mine, strive ye, at least, to move our sire's implacable, inexorable silence, that he send me not away dishonoured,—who am the suppliant of the god,—in such wise as this, with no word of response.

ANTIGONE

Tell him thyself, unhappy one, what thou hast come to seek. As words flow, perchance they touch to joy, perchance they glow with anger, or with tenderness, and so they somehow give a voice to the dumb.

POLYNEICES

Then will I speak boldly,—for thou dost admonish me well,—first claiming the help of the god himself, from whose altar the king of this land raised me, that I might come hither, with warranty to speak and hear, and go my way unharmed. And I will crave, strangers, that these pledges be kept with me by you, and by my sisters here, and by my sire.—But now I would fain tell thee, father, why I came.

I have been driven, an exile, from my fatherland, because, as eldest-born, I claimed to sit in thy sovereign seat. Wherefore Eteocles, though the younger, thrust me from the land, when he had neither worsted me in argument, nor come to trial of might and deed,—no, but won the city over. And of this I deem it most likely that the curse on thy house is the cause; then from soothsayers also I so hear. For when I came to Dorian Argos, I took the daughter of Adrastus to wife; and I bound to me by oath all of the Apian land who are foremost in renown of war, that with them I might levy the sevenfold host of spearmen against Thebes, and die in my just cause, or cast the doers of this wrong from the realm.

Well, and wherefore have I come hither now? With suppliant prayers, my father, unto thee—mine own, and the prayers of mine allies, who now, with seven hosts behind their seven spears, have set their leaguer round the plain of Thebes; of whom is swift-speared Amphiaraus, matchless warrior, matchless augur; then the son of Oeneus, Aetolian Tydeus; Eteoclus third, of Argive birth; the fourth, Hippomedon, sent by Talaos, his sire; while Capaneus, the fifth, vaunts that he will burn Thebes with fire, unto the ground; and sixth, Arcadian Parthenopaeus rushes to the war, named from that virgin of other days whose marriage in after-time gave him birth, trusty son of Atalanta. Last, I, thy son,—or if not thine, but offspring of an evil fate, yet thine at least in name,—lead the fearless host of Argos unto Thebes.

And we, by these thy children and by thy life, my father, implore thee all, praying thee to remit thy stern wrath against me, as I go forth to chastise my brother, who hath thrust me out and robbed me of my fatherland. For if aught of truth is told by oracles, they said that victory should be with those whom thou shouldst join.

Then, by our fountains and by the gods of our race, I ask thee to hearken and to yield; a beggar and an exile am I, an exile thou; by court to others we have a home, both thou and I, sharers of one doom; while *he*, king in the house—woe is me!—mocks in his pride at thee and me alike.

But, if thou assist my purpose, small toil or time, and I will scatter his strength to the winds: and so will I bring thee and stablish thee in thine own house, and stablish myself, when I have cast him out by force. Be thy will with me, and that boast may be mine: without thee, I cannot e'en return alive.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

For his sake who hath sent him, Oedipus, speak, as seems thee good, ere thou send the man away.

OEDIPUS

Nay, then, my friends, guardians of this land, were not Theseus he who had sent him hither to me, desiring that he should have my response, never should he have heard this voice. But now he shall be graced with it, ere he go,—yea, and hear from me such words as shall never gladden his life: —villain, who when thou hadst the sceptre and the throne, which now thy brother hath in Thebes, dravest me, thine own father, into exile, and madest me citiless, and madest me to wear this garb which now thou weepest to behold, when thou hast come unto the same stress of misery as I. The time for tears is past: no, *I* must bear this burden while I live, ever thinking of thee as of a murderer; for 'tis thou that hast brought my days to this anguish, 'tis thou that hast thrust me out; to thee I owe it that I wander, begging my daily bread from strangers. And, had these daughters not been born to be my comfort, verily I had been dead, for aught of help from thee. Now, these girls preserve me, these my nurses, these who are men, not women, in true service: but ye are aliens, and no sons of mine.

Therefore the eyes of Fate look upon thee—not yet as they will look anon, if indeed those hosts are moving against Thebes. Never canst thou overthrow that city; no, first shalt thou fall stained with bloodshed, and thy brother likewise. Such the curses that my soul sent forth before against you twain, and such do I now invoke to fight for me, that ye may deem it meet to revere parents, nor scorn your father utterly, because he is sightless who begat such sons; for these maidens did not thus. So my curses have control of thy 'supplication' and thy 'throne,'—if indeed Justice, revealed from of old, sits with Zeus in the might of the eternal laws.

And thou—begone, abhorred of me, and unfathered!—begone, thou vilest of the vile, and with thee take these my curses which I call down on thee—never to vanquish the land of thy race, no, nor ever return to hill-girt Argos, but by a kindred hand to die, and slay him by whom thou hast been driven out. Such is my prayer; and I call the paternal darkness of dread Tartarus to take thee unto another home,—I call the spirits of

this place,—I call the Destroying God, who hath set that dreadful hatred in you twain. Go, with these words in thine ears—go, and publish it to the Cadmeans all, yea, and to thine own staunch allies, that Oedipus hath divided such honours to his sons.

LEADER

Polyneices, in thy past goings I take no joy; and now go thy way with speed.

POLYNEICES

Alas, for my journey and my baffled hope: alas, for my comrades! What an end was that march to have, whereon we sallied forth from Argos: woe is me!—aye, such an end, that I may not even utter it to any of my companions, or turn them back, but must go in silence to meet this doom.

Ah ye, his daughters and my sisters,—since ye hear these hard prayers of your sire,—if this father's curses be fulfilled, and some way of return to Thebes be found for you, oh, as ye fear the gods, do not, for your part, dishonour me,—nay, give me burial, and due funeral rites. And so the praise which ye now win from yonder man, for your service, shall be increased by another praise not less, by reason of the office wrought for me.

ANTIGONE

Polyneices, I entreat thee, hear me in one thing!

POLYNEICES

What is it, dearest Antigone? Speak!

ANTIGONE

Turn thy host back to Argos,—aye, with all speed,—and destroy not thyself and Thebes.

POLYNEICES

Nay, it cannot be: for how again could I lead the same host, when once I had blenched?

ANTIGONE

But why, my brother, should thine anger rise again? What gain is promised thee in destroying thy native city?

POLYNEICES

'Tis shame to be an exile, and, eldest born as I am, to be thus mocked on my brother's part.

ANTIGONE

Seest thou, then, to what sure fulfilment thou art bringing his prophecies, who bodes mutual slaying for you twain?

POLYNEICES

Aye, for he wishes it:—but I must not yield.

ANTIGONE

Ah me unhappy!—But who will dare to follow thee, hearing what prophecies yon man hath uttered?

POLYNEICES

I will not e'en report ill tidings: 'tis a good leader's part to tell the better news, and not the worse.

ANTIGONE

Brother! Thy resolve, then, is thus fixed?

POLYNEICES

Yea,—and detain me not. For mine it now shall be to tread yon path, with evil doom and omen from this my sire and from his Furies; but for you twain, may Zeus make your path bright, if ye do my wishes when I am dead,—since in my life ye can do them no more.—(*He gently disengages himself from their embrace.*) Now, release me,—and farewell; for nevermore shall ye behold me living.

ANTIGONE

Woe is me!

POLYNEICES

Mourn not for me.

ANTIGONE

And who would not bewail thee, brother, who thus art hurrying to death foreseen?

POLYNEICES

If 'tis fate, I must die.

ANTIGONE

Nay, nay,—hear my pleading!

POLYNEICES

Plead not amiss.

ANTIGONE

Then woe is me, indeed, if I must lose thee!

POLYNEICES

Nay, that rests with Fortune,—that end or another.—For you twain, at least, I pray the gods that ye never meet with ill; for in all men's eyes ye are unworthy to suffer.

(*He goes out on the spectators' left.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 1

Behold, new ills have newly come, in our hearing, from the sightless stranger,—ills fraught with a heavy doom; unless, perchance, Fate is finding its goal. For 'tis not mine to say that a decree of Heaven is ever vain: watchful, aye watchful of those decrees is Time, overthrowing some fortunes, and on the morrow lifting others, again, to honour.—Hark that sound in the sky!—Zeus defend us!

(*Thunder is heard.*)

OEDIPUS

My children, my children! If there be any man to send, would that some one would fetch hither the peerless Theseus!

ANTIGONE

And what, father, is the aim of thy summons?

OEDIPUS

This winged thunder of Zeus will lead me anon to Hades: nay, send, and tarry not.

(*A second peal is heard.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

antistrophe 1

Hark! With louder noise it crashes down, unutterable, hurled by Zeus! The hair of my head stands up for fear, my soul is sore dismayed; for again the lightning flashes in the sky. Oh, to what event will it give birth? I am afraid, for never in vain doth it rush forth, or without grave issue. O thou dread sky! O Zeus!

OEDIPUS

Daughters, his destined end hath come upon your sire; he can turn his face from it no more.

ANTIGONE

How knowest thou? What sign hath told thee this?

OEDIPUS

I know it well.—But let some one go, I pray you, with all speed, and bring hither the lord of this realm.

(*Another peal is heard.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 2

Ha! Listen! Once again that piercing thunder-voice is around us! Be merciful, O thou god, be merciful, if thou art bringing aught of gloom for the land our mother! Gracious may I find thee, nor, because I have looked on a man accurst, have some meed, not of blessing for my portion! O Zeus our lord, to thee I cry!

OEDIPUS

Is the man near? Will he find me still alive, children, and master of my mind?

ANTIGONE

And what is the pledge which thou wouldst have fixed in thy mind?

OEDIPUS

In return for his benefits, I would duly give him the requital promised when I received them.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

antistrophe 2

What ho, my son, hither, come hither! Or if in the glade's inmost recess, for the honour of the sea-god Poseidon, thou art hallowing his altar with sacrifice,—come thence! Worthy art thou in the stranger's sight, worthy are thy city and thy folk, that he should render a just recompense for benefits. Haste, come quickly, O king!

(THESEUS *enters, on the spectators' right.*)

THESEUS

Wherefore once more rings forth a summons from you all,—from my people as clearly as from our guest? Can a thunderbolt from Zeus be the cause, or rushing hail in its fierce onset? All forebodings may find place, when the god sends such a storm.

OEDIPUS

King, welcome is thy presence; and 'tis some god that hath made for thee the good fortune of this coming.

THESEUS

And what new thing hath now befallen, son of Laius?

OEDIPUS

My life hangs in the scale: and I fain would die guiltless of bad faith to thee and to this city, in respect of my pledges.

THESEUS

And what sign of thy fate holds thee in suspense?

OEDIPUS

The gods, their own heralds, bring me the tidings, with no failure in the signs appointed of old.

THESEUS

What sayest thou are the signs of these things, old man?

OEDIPUS

The thunder, peal on peal,—the lightning, flash on flash, hurled from the unconquered hand.

THESEUS

Thou winnest my belief, for in much I find thee a prophet whose voice is not false;—then speak what must be done.

OEDIPUS

Son of Aegeus, I will unfold that which shall be a treasure for this thy city, such as age can never mar. Anon, unaided, and with no hand to guide me, I will show the way to the place where I must die. But that place reveal thou never unto mortal man,—tell not where it is hidden, nor in what region it lies; that so it may ever make for thee a defence, better than many shields, better than the succouring spear of neighbours.

But, for mysteries which speech may not profane, thou shalt mark them for thyself, when thou comest to that place alone: since neither to any of this people can I utter them, nor to mine own children, dear though they are. No, guard them thou alone; and when thou art coming to the end of life, disclose them to thy heir alone; let him teach his heir; and so thenceforth.

And thus shalt thou hold this city unscathed from the side of the Dragon's brood;—full many States lightly enter on offence, e'en though their neighbour lives aright. For the gods are slow, though they are sure, in visitation, when men scorn godliness, and turn to frenzy. Not such be thy fate, son of Aegeus.—Nay, thou knowest such things, without my precepts.

But to that place—for the divine summons urges me—let us now set forth, and hesitate no more.—(*As if suddenly inspired, he moves with slow but firm steps towards the left of the scene, beckoning the others*

onward.) My children, follow me,—thus,—for I now have in strange wise been made your guide, as ye were your sire's. On,—touch me not,—nay, suffer me unaided to find out that sacred tomb where 'tis my portion to be buried in this land.

This way,—hither,—this way!—for this way doth Guiding Hermes lead me, and the goddess of the dead!

O light,—no light to me,—mine once thou wast, I ween,—but now my body feels thee for the last time! For now go I to hide the close of my life with Hades.—Truest of friends! blessed be thou, and this land, and thy lieges; and, when your days are blest, think on me the dead, for your welfare evermore.

(*He passes from the stage on the spectators' left, followed by his daughters,* THESEUS, *and attendants.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

If with prayer I may adore the Unseen Goddess, and thee, lord of the children of night, O hear me, Aidoneus, Aidoneus! Not in pain, not by a doom that wakes sore lament, may the stranger pass to the fields of the dead below, the all-enshrouding, and to the Stygian house. Many were the sorrows that came to him without cause; but in requital a just god will lift him up.

antistrophe

Goddesses Infernal! And thou, dread form of the unconquered hound, thou who hast thy lair in those gates of many guests, thou untameable Watcher of Hell, gnarling from the cavern's jaws, as rumour from the beginning tells of thee!

Hear me, O Death, son of Earth and Tartarus! May that Watcher leave a clear path for the stranger on his way to the nether fields of the dead! To thee I call, giver of the eternal sleep.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters from the left.*)

MESSENGER

Countrymen, my tidings might most shortly be summed thus: Oedipus is gone. But the story of the hap may not be told in brief words, as the deeds yonder were not briefly done.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

He is gone, hapless one?

MESSENGER

Be sure that he hath passed from life.

LEADER

Ah, how? by a god-sent doom, and painless?

MESSENGER

There thou touchest on what is indeed worthy of wonder. How he moved hence, thou thyself must know, since thou wast here,—with no friend to show the way, but guide himself unto us all.

Now, when he had come to the sheer Threshold, bound by brazen steps to earth's deep roots, he paused in one of many branching paths, near the basin in the rock, where the inviolate covenant of Theseus and Peirithous hath its memorial. He stood midway between that basin and the Thorician stone,—the hollow pear-tree and the marble tomb; then sate him down, and loosed his sordid raiment.

And then he called his daughters, and bade them fetch water from some fount, that he should wash, and make a drink-offering. And they went to the hill which was in view, Demeter's hill who guards the tender plants, and in short space brought that which their father had enjoined; then they ministered to him with washing, and dressed him, as use ordains.

But when he had content of doing all, and no part of his desire was now unheeded, then was thunder from the Zeus of the Shades: and the maidens shuddered as they heard; they fell at their father's knees, and wept, nor ceased from beating the breast, and wailing very sore.

And when he heard their sudden bitter cry, he put his arms around them, and said: 'My children, this day ends your father's life. For now all hath perished that was mine, and no more shall ye bear the burden of tending me,—no light one, well I know, my children; yet one little word makes all those toils as nought; *love* had ye from me, as from none beside; and now ye shall have me with you no more, through all your days to come.'

On such wise, close-clinging to each other, sire and daughters sobbed and wept. But when they had made an end of wailing, and the sound went up no more, there was a stillness; and suddenly a voice of one who cried aloud to him, so that the hair of all stood up on their heads for sudden fear, and they were afraid. For the god called him with many callings and manifold: *'Oedipus, Oedipus, why delay we to go? Thou tarriest too long.'*

But when he perceived that he was called of the god, he craved that the king Theseus should draw near; and when he came near, said: 'O my friend, give, I pray thee, the solemn pledge of thy right hand to my children, and ye, daughters, to him; and promise thou never to forsake them of thy free will, but to do all things for their good, as thy friendship and the time may prompt.' And he, like a man of noble spirit, without making lament, sware to keep that promise to his friend.

But when Theseus had so promised, straightway Oedipus felt for his children with blind hands, and said: 'O my children, ye must be nobly brave of heart, and depart from this place, nor ask to behold unlawful sights, or to hear such speech as may not be heard. Nay, go with all haste; only let Theseus be present, as is his right, a witness of those things which are to be.'

So spake he, and we all heard; and with streaming tears and with lamentation we followed the maidens away. But when we had gone apart, after no long time we looked back, and Oedipus we saw nowhere any more, but the king alone, holding his hand before his face to screen his eyes, as if some dread sight had been seen, and such as none might endure to behold. And then, after a short space, we saw him salute the earth and the home of the gods above, both at once, in one prayer.

But by what doom Oedipus perished, no man can tell, save Theseus alone. No fiery thunderbolt of the god removed him in that hour, nor any rising of storm from the sea; but either a messenger from the gods, or the world of the dead, the nether adamant, riven for him in love, without pain; for the passing of the man was not with lamentation, or in sickness and suffering, but, above mortal's, wonderful. And if to any I seem to speak folly, I would not woo their belief, who count me foolish.

LEADER

And where are the maidens, and their escort?

MESSENGER

Not far hence; for the sounds of mourning tell plainly that they approach.

(ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE *enter, chanting their song of lamentation.*)

ANTIGONE

strophe 1

Woe, woe! Now, indeed, is it for us, unhappy sisters, in all fulness to bewail the curse on the blood that is ours from our sire! For him, while he lived, we bore that long pain without pause; and at the last a sight and a loss that baffle thought are ours to tell.

CHORUS

And how is it with you?

ANTIGONE

We can but conjecture, friends.

CHORUS

He is gone?

ANTIGONE

Even as thou mightest wish: yea, surely, when death met him not in war, or on the deep, but he was snatched to the viewless fields by some swift, strange doom. Ah me! and a night as of death hath come on the eyes of us twain: for how shall we find our bitter livelihood, roaming to some far land, or on the waves of the sea?

ISMENE

I know not. Oh that deadly Hades would join me in death unto mine aged sire! Woe is me! I cannot live the life that must be mine.

CHORUS

Best of daughters, sisters twain, Heaven's doom must be borne: be no more fired with too much grief: ye have so fared that ye should not repine.

ANTIGONE

antistrophe 1

Ah, so care past can seem lost joy! For that which was no way sweet had sweetness, while therewith I held *him* in mine embrace. Ah, father, dear one, ah thou who hast put on the darkness of the under-world for ever, not even there shalt thou ever lack our love,—her love and mine.

CHORUS

He hath fared—

ANTIGONE

He hath fared as he would.

CHORUS

In what wise?

ANTIGONE

On foreign ground, the ground of his choice, he hath died; in the shadow of the grave he hath his bed for ever; and he hath left mourning behind him, not barren of tears. For with these streaming eyes, father, I bewail thee; nor know I, ah me, how to quell my sorrow for thee, my sorrow that is so great.—Ah me! 'twas thy wish to die in a strange land; but now thou hast died without gifts at my hand.

ISMENE

Woe is me! What new fate, think'st thou, awaits thee and me, my sister, thus orphaned of our sire?

CHORUS

Nay, since he hath found a blessed end, my children, cease from this lament; no mortal is hard for evil fortune to capture.

ANTIGONE

strophe 2

Sister, let us hasten back.

ISMENE

Unto what deed?

ANTIGONE

A longing fills my soul.

ISMENE

Whereof?

ANTIGONE

To see the dark home—

ISMENE

Of whom?

ANTIGONE

Ah me! of our sire.

ISMENE

And how can this thing be lawful? Hast thou no understanding?

ANTIGONE

Why this reproof?

ISMENE

And knowest thou not this also—

ANTIGONE

What wouldst thou tell me more?—

ISMENE

That he was perishing without tomb, apart from all?

ANTIGONE

Lead me thither, and then slay me also.

ISMENE

Ah me unhappy! Friendless and helpless, where am I now to live my hapless life?

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

My children, fear not.

ANTIGONE

But whither am I to flee?

CHORUS

Already a refuge hath been found—

ANTIGONE

How meanest thou?—

CHORUS

—for your fortunes, that no harm should touch them.

ANTIGONE

I know it well.

CHORUS

What, then, is thy thought?

ANTIGONE

How we are to go home, I cannot tell.

CHORUS

And do not seek to go.

ANTIGONE

Trouble besets us.

CHORUS

And erstwhile bore hardly on you.

ANTIGONE

Desperate then, and now more cruel than despair.

CHORUS

Great, verily, is the sea of your troubles.

ANTIGONE

Alas, alas! O Zeus, whither shall we turn? To what last hope doth fate now urge us?

(THESEUS *enters.*)

THESEUS

systema

Weep no more, maidens: for where the kindness of the Dark Powers is an abiding grace to the quick and to the dead, there is no room for mourning; divine anger would follow.

ANTIGONE

Son of Aegeus, we supplicate thee!

THESEUS

For the obtaining of what desire, my children?

ANTIGONE

We fain would look with our own eyes upon our father's tomb.

THESEUS

Nay, it is not lawful.

ANTIGONE

How sayest thou, king, lord of Athens?

THESEUS

My children, he gave me charge that no one should draw nigh unto that place, or greet with voice the sacred tomb wherein he sleeps. And he said that, while I duly kept that word, I should always hold the land unharmed. These pledges, therefore, were heard from my lips by the god, and by the all-seeing Watcher of oaths, the servant of Zeus.

ANTIGONE

Nay, then, if this is pleasing to the dead, with this we must content us. But send us to Thebes the ancient, if haply we may hinder the bloodshed that is threatened to our brothers.

THESEUS

So will I do; and if in aught beside I can profit you, and pleasure the dead who hath lately gone from us, I am bound to spare no pains.

CHORUS

Come, cease lamentation, lift it up no more; for verily these things stand fast.

1. Sophocles probably had Herodotus, II, 35 in mind when he wrote these lines.

2. Sophocles here has departed from the common account which made Eteocles the elder.

3. This epithet is applied to Zeus because he was conceived to be the protector of *moriai,* the sacred olives.

THE PLAYS OF EURIPIDES

I
ALCESTIS

Characters in the Play

Apollo
Death
Chorus of Old Men
A Woman Servant
Alcestis, *the Queen, wife of* Admetus
Admetus, *King of Thessaly*
Eumelus, *their child*
Heracles
Pheres, *father of* Admetus
A Man Servant

INTRODUCTION

THE ALCESTIS is the earliest of the plays of Euripides which we now possess. Presented in 438 B.C., it constituted the fourth play in a tetralogy which the poet had entered in competition for the tragic award of that year. Contrary to the usual practice which demanded that the fourth member of the tetralogy be a Satyr-play, Euripides has placed the *Alcestis* in this position, for which by its very character as a "tragi-comedy" it is peculiarly suited. Although on the whole the play is tragic in tone, it is rendered somewhat lighter, first by the part which the slightly drunken Heracles plays in the action, and finally by the happy resolution of the plot.

Possibly a folk-tale of wide currency was the original source for the legend upon which Euridipes drew in writing his play. The version which he knew, and which had been interpreted by an earlier tragic poet, Phrynichus, contained the story of Admetus, king of Thessaly. Apollo, so the legend runs, had incurred the displeasure of his father Zeus, had been banished from Olympus, and condemned to serve under a mortal master for a stated period of time. He came to Thessaly and dwelt with Admetus, an exemplary king. As Apollo's term of service was drawing to a close, it became known that Admetus was doomed to an early death. Apollo, desiring to reward him for his kindness and apparent excellence of character, prevailed upon the Fates to spare him from his premature death. The Fates agreed, on condition that Admetus could procure a substitute who would be willing to die in his place. Admetus approached his father, mother, friends and kin, in his effort to find such a substitute, but all refused his request. Finally it was Alcestis, his devoted wife, who undertook the service. The play opens on the day when she is to die.

Euripides in the *Alcestis* has taken a human problem and stated it in such striking terms of character and situation that its point cannot be missed. Pheres in his way illuminates the question at issue by his uncompromising condemnation of his son, Admetus. Alcestis has a more important function since her character throws that of her husband into higher relief. She herself meets her end with fortitude, breaking just enough at the very last moment so that her portrayal becomes convincing. She manages, however, to be calm and matter-of-fact, in striking con-

trast to Admetus when in his egotism and sentimentality he begins to lose control of himself. As the play advances a sharper and sharper light is thrown upon him. In the last analysis, the actual means by which Alcestis is restored and the part which Heracles plays here, which in turn cannot be divorced from his conventional rôle as a brawling character in straight comedy, are irrelevant so far as the central significance of the play is concerned. This significance lies in the study of self-sacrifice and its implications. There is nothing but praise for Alcestis' act, yet the further problem is raised: what happens to the individual who accepts the benefits of a sacrifice made by another? Admetus at the end of the play has had the veil torn from his eyes, and he realizes at last the extent of his own vileness. With a sure hand Euripides has communicated his meaning.

ALCESTIS

(SCENE:—*At Pherae, outside the Palace of* ADMETUS, *King of Thessaly. The centre of the scene represents a portico with columns and a large double-door. To the left are the women's quarters, to the right the guest rooms. The centre doors of the Palace slowly open inwards, and Apollo comes out. In his left hand he carries a large unstrung golden bow. He moves slowly and majestically, turns, and raises his right hand in salutation to the Palace.*)

APOLLO

DWELLING of Admetus, wherein I, a God, deigned to accept the food of serfs!

The cause was Zeus. He struck Asclepius, my son, full in the breast with a bolt of thunder, and laid him dead. Then in wild rage I slew the Cyclopes who forge the fire of Zeus. To atone for this my Father forced me to labour as a hireling for a mortal man; and I came to this country, and tended oxen for my host. To this hour I have protected him and his. I, who am just, chanced on the son of Pheres, a just man, whom I have saved from Death by tricking the Fates. The Goddesses pledged me their faith Admetus should escape immediate death if, in exchange, another corpse were given to the Under-Gods.

One by one he tested all his friends, and even his father and the old mother who had brought him forth—and found none that would die for him and never more behold the light of day, save only his wife. Now, her spirit waiting to break loose, she droops upon his arm within the house; this is the day when she must die and render up her life.

But I must leave this Palace's dear roof, for fear pollution soil me in the house.

See! Death, Lord of All the Dead, now comes to lead her to the house of Hades! Most punctually he comes! How well he marked the day she had to die!

(*From the right comes* DEATH, *with a drawn sword in his hand. He moves stealthily towards the Palace; then sees* APOLLO *and halts abruptly. The two Deities confront each other.*)

DEATH

Ha! Phoebus! You! Before this Palace! Lawlessly would you grasp, abolish the rights of the Lower Gods! Did you not beguile the Fates and snatch Admetus from the grave? Does not that suffice? Now, once again, you have armed your hand with the bow, to guard the daughter of Pelias who must die in her husband's stead!

APOLLO

Fear not! I hold for right, and proffer you just words.

DEATH

If you hold for right, why then your bow?

APOLLO

My custom is ever to carry it.

DEATH

Yes! And you use it unjustly to aid this house!

APOLLO

I grieve for a friend's woe.

DEATH

So you would rob me of a second body?

APOLLO

Not by force I won the other.

DEATH

Why, then, is he in the world and not below the ground?

APOLLO

In his stead he gives his wife—whom you have come to take.

DEATH

And shall take—to the Underworld below the earth!

APOLLO

Take her, and go! I know not if I can persuade you . . .

DEATH

Not to kill her I must kill? I am appointed to that task.

APOLLO

No, no! But to delay death for those about to die.

DEATH

I hear your words and guess your wish!

APOLLO

May not Alcestis live to old age?

DEATH

No! I also prize my rights!

APOLLO

Yet at most you win one life.

DEATH

They who die young yield me a greater prize.

APOLLO

If she dies old, the burial will be richer.

DEATH

Phoebus, that argument favours the rich.

APOLLO

What! Are you witty unawares?

DEATH

The rich would gladly pay to die old.

APOLLO

So you will not grant me this favour?

DEATH

Not I! You know my nature.

APOLLO

Yes! Hateful to men and a horror to the gods!

DEATH

You cannot always have more than your due.

APOLLO

Yet you shall change, most cruel though you are! For a man comes to the dwelling of Pheres, sent by Eurystheus to fetch a horse-drawn chariot from the harsh-wintered lands of Thrace; and he shall be a guest in the house of Admetus, and by force shall he tear this woman from you. Thus shall you gain no thanks from us, and yet you shall do this thing—and my hatred be upon you!

(APOLLO *goes out.* DEATH *gazes after him derisively.*)

DEATH

Talk all you will, you get no more of me! The woman shall go down to the dwelling of Hades.

Now must I go to consecrate her for the sacrifice with this sword; for when once this blade has shorn the victim's hair, then he is sacred to the Lower Gods!

(DEATH *enters the Palace by the open main door. The* CHORUS *enters from the right. They are the Elders or Notables of the city, and therefore move slowly, leaning upon their staffs.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*chanting*)

Why is there no sound outside the Palace? Why is the dwelling of Admetus silent? Not a friend here to tell me if I must weep for a dead Queen or whether she lives and looks upon the light, Alcestis, the daughter of Pelias, whom among all women I hold the best wife to her spouse!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Is a sob to be heard?
Or the beating of hands
In the house?
The lament for her end?
Not one,
Not one of her servants
Stands at the gate!

Ah! to roll back the wave of our woe,
O Healer,
Appear!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Were she dead
They had not been silent.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

She is but a dead body!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Yet she has not departed the house.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Ah! Let me not boast!
Why do you cling to hope?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS
Would Admetus bury her solitary,
Make a grave alone for a wife so dear?

CHORUS
At the gate I see not
The lustral water from the spring
Which stands at the gates of the dead!
No shorn tress in the portal
Laid in lament for the dead!
The young women beat not their hands!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS
Yet to-day is the day appointed. . . .

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS
Ah! What have you said?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS
When she must descend under earth!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS
You have pierced my soul!
You have pierced my mind!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS
He that for long
Has been held in esteem
Must weep when the good are destroyed.

CHORUS
No!
There is no place on earth
To send forth a suppliant ship—
Not to Lycia,
Not to Ammon's waterless shrine—
To save her from death!
The dreadful doom is at hand.
To what laden altar of what God
Shall I turn my steps?

He alone—
If the light yet shone for his eye—
Asclepius, Phoebus's son,
Could have led her back

From the land of shadows,
From the gates of Hades.
For he raised the dead
Ere the Zeus-driven shaft
Slew him with thunder fire. . . .
But now
What hope can I hold for her life?

LEADER (*chanting*)
The King has fulfilled
Every rite;
The altars of all the Gods
Drip with the blood of slain beasts:
Nothing, nothing avails.

(*From the women's quarters in the left wing of the Palace comes a woman in tears. She is not a slave, but one of the personal attendants on the Queen.*)

But now from the house comes one of her women servants, all in tears. What now shall I learn? (*To the weeping Servant*) It is well to weep when our lords are in sorrow—but tell us, we would know, is she alive, is she dead?

SERVANT
You may say she is both alive and dead.

LEADER
How can the same man be dead and yet behold the light?

SERVANT
She gasps, she is on the verge of death.

LEADER
Ah, unhappy man! For such a husband what loss is such a wife!

SERVANT
The King will not know his loss until he suffers it.

LEADER
Then there is no hope that her life may be saved?

SERVANT
The fated day constrains her.

LEADER
Are all things befitting prepared for her?

SERVANT

The robes in which her lord will bury her are ready.

LEADER

Then let her know that she dies gloriously, the best of women beneath the sun by far!

SERVANT

How should she not be the best! Who shall deny it? What should the best among women be? How better might a woman hold faith to her lord than gladly to die for him? This the whole city knows, but you will marvel when you hear what she has done within the house. When she knew that the last of her days was come she bathed her white body in river water, she took garments and gems from her rooms of cedar wood, and clad herself nobly; then, standing before the hearth-shrine, she uttered this prayer:

'O Goddess, since now I must descend beneath the earth, for the last time I make supplication to you: and entreat you to protect my motherless children. Wed my son to a fair bride, and my daughter to a noble husband. Let not my children die untimely, as I their mother am destroyed, but grant that they live out happy lives with good fortune in their own land!'

To every altar in Admetus's house she went, hung them with garlands, offered prayer, cut myrtle boughs—unweeping, unlamenting; nor did the coming doom change the bright colour of her face.

Then to her marriage-room she went, flung herself down upon her bed, and wept, and said:

'O my marriage-bed, wherein I loosed my virgin girdle to him for whom I die! Farewell! I have no hatred for you. Only me you lose. Because I held my faith to you and to my lord—I must die. Another woman shall possess you, not more chaste indeed than I, more fortunate perhaps.'

She fell upon her knees and kissed it, and all the bed was damp with the tide of tears which flooded to her eyes. And when she was fulfilled of many tears, drooping she rose from her bed and made as if to go, and many times she turned to go and many times turned back, and flung herself once more upon the bed.

Her children clung to their mother's dress, and wept; and she clasped them in her arms and kissed them turn by turn, as a dying woman.

All the servants in the house wept with compassion for their Queen. But she held out her hand to each, and there was none so base to whom she did not speak, and who did not reply again.

Such is the misery in Admetus's house. If he had died, he would be nothing now; and, having escaped, he suffers an agony he will never forget.

LEADER

And does Admetus lament this woe—since he must be robbed of so noble a woman?

SERVANT

He weeps, and clasps in his arms his dear bedfellow, and cries to her not to abandon him, asking impossible things. For she pines, and is wasted by sickness. She falls away, a frail burden on his arm; and yet, though faintly, she still breathes, still strives to look upon the sunlight, which she shall never see hereafter—since now for the last time she looks upon the orb and splendour of the sun!

I go, and shall announce that you are here; for all men are not so well-minded to their lords as loyally to stand near them in misfortunes, but you for long have been a friend to both my lords.

(*She goes back into the women's quarters of the Palace. The* CHORUS *now begins to sing.*)

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

O Zeus,
What end to these woes?
What escape from the Fate
Which oppresses our lords?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Will none come forth?
Must I shear my hair?
Must we wrap ourselves
In black mourning folds?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

It is certain, O friends, it is certain!
But still let us cry to the Gods;
Very great is the power of the Gods.

CHORUS

O King, O Healer,
Seek out appeasement
To Admetus's agony!
Grant this, Oh, grant it!
Once before did you find it;
Now once more
Be the Releaser from death.
The Restrainer of blood-drenched Hades!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Alas!
O son of Pheres.
What ills shall you suffer
Being robbed of your spouse!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

At sight of such woes
Shall we cut our throats?
Shall we slip
A dangling noose round our necks?

CHORUS

See! See!
She comes
From the house with her lord!
Cry out, Oh, lament.
O land of Pherae,
For the best of women
Fades away in her doom
Under the earth,
To dark Hades!

(*From the central door of the Palace comes a splendid but tragical procession. Preceded by the royal guards,* ADMETUS *enters, supporting* ALCESTIS. *The two children, a boy and a girl, cling to their mother's dress. There is a train of attendants and waiting women, who bring a low throne for the fainting* ALCESTIS.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*chanting*)

Never shall I say that we ought to rejoice in marriage, but rather weep; this have I seen from of old and now I look upon the fate of the King, who loses the best of wives, and henceforth until the end his life shall be intolerable.

ALCESTIS (*chanting*)

Sun, and you, light of day,
Vast whirlings of swift cloud!

ADMETUS

The sun looks upon you and me, both of us miserable, who have wrought nothing against the Gods to deserve death.

ALCESTIS (*chanting*)
O Earth, O roof-tree of my home,
Bridal-bed of my country, Iolcus!

ADMETUS
Rouse up, O unhappy one, and do not leave me! Call upon the mighty Gods to pity!

ALCESTIS
(*starting up and gazing wildly in terror, chanting*)
I see the two-oared boat,
I see the boat on the lake!
And Charon,
Ferryman of the Dead,
Calls to me, his hand on the oar:
'Why linger? Hasten! You delay me!'
Angrily he urges me.

ADMETUS
Alas! How bitter to me is that ferrying of which you speak! O my unhappy one, how we suffer!

ALCESTIS (*chanting*)
He drags me, he drags me away—
Do you not see?—
To the House of the Dead,
The Winged One
Glaring under dark brows,
Hades!—
What is it you do?
Set me free!—
What a path must I travel,
O most hapless of women!

ADMETUS
O piteous to those that love you, above all to me and to these children who sorrow in this common grief!

ALCESTIS (*chanting*)
Loose me, Oh, loose me now;
Lay me down;
All strength is gone from my feet.

(*She falls back in the throne.*)

Hades draws near!

Dark night falls on my eyes,
My children, my children,
Never more, Oh, never more
Shall your mother be yours!
O children, farewell,
Live happy in the light of day!

ADMETUS (*chanting*)

Alas! I hear this unhappy speech, and for me it is worse than all death. Ah! By the Gods, do not abandon me! Ah! By our children, whom you leave motherless, take heart! If you die, I become as nothing; in you we have our life and death; we revere your love.

ALCESTIS (*recovering herself*)

Admetus, you see the things I suffer; and now before I die I mean to tell you what I wish.

To show you honour and—at the cost of my life—that you may still behold the light, I die; and yet I might have lived and wedded any in Thessaly I chose, and dwelt with happiness in a royal home. But, torn from you, I would not live with fatherless children, nor have I hoarded up those gifts of youth in which I found delight. Yet he who begot you, she who brought you forth, abandoned you when it had been beautiful in them to die, beautiful to die with dignity to save their son! They had no child but you, no hope if you were dead that other children might be born to them. Thus I should have lived my life out, and you too, and you would not lament as now, made solitary from your wife, that you must rear our children motherless!

But these things are a God's doing and are thus.

Well! Do not forget this gift, for I shall ask—not a recompense, since nothing is more precious than life, but—only what is just, as you yourself will say, since if you have not lost your senses you must love these children no less than I. Let them be masters in my house; marry not again, and set a stepmother over them, a woman harsher than I, who in her jealousy will lift her hand against my children and yours. Ah! not this, let not this be, I entreat you! The new stepmother hates the first wife's children, the viper itself is not more cruel. The son indeed finds a strong rampart in his father—but you, my daughter, how shall you live your virgin life out in happiness? How will you fare with your father's new wife? Ah! Let her not cast evil report upon you and thus wreck your marriage in the height of your youth! You will have no mother, O my child, to give you in marriage, to comfort you in childbed when none is tenderer than a mother!

And I must die. Not to-morrow, nor to-morrow's morrow comes this

misfortune on me, but even now I shall be named with those that are no more. Farewell! Live happy! You, my husband, may boast you had the best of wives; and you, my children, that you lost the best of mothers!
(*She falls back.*)

LEADER

Take heart! I do not hesitate to speak for him. This he will do, unless he has lost his senses.

ADMETUS

It shall be so, it shall be! Have no fear! And since I held you living as my wife, so, when dead, you only shall be called my wife, and in your place no bride of Thessaly shall salute me hers; no other woman is noble enough for that, no other indeed so beautiful of face. My children shall suffice me; I pray the Gods I may enjoy them, since you we have not enjoyed.

I shall wear mourning for you, O my wife, not for one year but all my days, abhorring the woman who bore me, hating my father—for they loved me in words, not deeds. But you—to save my life you give the dearest thing you have! Should I not weep then, losing such a wife as you?

I shall make an end of merry drinking parties, and of flower-crowned feasts and of the music which possessed my house. Never again shall I touch the lyre, never again shall I raise my spirits to sing to the Libyan flute—for you have taken from me all my joy. Your image, carven by the skilled hands of artists, shall be laid in our marriage-bed; I shall clasp it, and my hands shall cling to it and I shall speak your name and so, not having you, shall think I have my dear wife in my arms—a cold delight, I know, but it will lighten the burden of my days. Often you will gladden me, appearing in my dreams; for sweet it is to look on those we love in dreams, however brief the night.

Ah! If I had the tongue and song of Orpheus so that I might charm Demeter's Daughter or her Lord, and snatch you back from Hades, I would go down to hell; and neither Pluto's dog nor Charon, Leader of the Dead, should hinder me until I had brought your life back to the light!

At least await me there whenever I shall die, and prepare the house where you will dwell with me. I shall lay a solemn charge upon these children to stretch me in the same cedar shroud with you, and lay my side against your side; for even in death let me not be separate from you, you who alone were faithful to me!

LEADER (*to* ADMETUS)

And I also will keep this sad mourning with you, as a friend with a friend; for she is worthy of it.

ALCESTIS

O my children, you have heard your father say that never will he set another wife over you and never thus insult me.

ADMETUS

Again I say it, and will perform it too!

ALCESTIS (*placing the children's hands in his*)

Then take these children from my hand.

ADMETUS

I take them—dear gifts from a dear hand.

ALCESTIS

Now you must be the mother for me to my children.

ADMETUS

It must be so, since they are robbed of you.

ALCESTIS

O children, I should have lived my life out—and I go to the Underworld.

ADMETUS

Alas! What shall *I* do, left alone by you?

ALCESTIS

Time will console you. The dead are nothing.

ADMETUS

Take me with you, by the Gods! Take me to the Underworld!

ALCESTIS

It is enough that I should die—for you.

ADMETUS

O Fate, what a wife you steal from me!

ALCESTIS (*growing faint*)

My dimmed eyes are heavily oppressed.

ADMETUS

O woman, I am lost if you leave me!

ALCESTIS

You may say of me that I am nothing.

ADMETUS

Lift up your head! Do not abandon your children!

ALCESTIS

Ah! Indeed it is unwillingly—but, farewell, my children!

ADMETUS

Look at them, look. . . .

ALCESTIS

I am nothing.

ADMETUS

What are you doing? Are you leaving me?

ALCESTIS (*falling back dead*)

Farewell.

ADMETUS (*staring at the body*)

Wretch that I am, I am lost!

LEADER

She is gone! The wife of Admetus is no more.

EUMELUS (*chanting*)

Ah! Misery!
Mother has gone,
Gone to the Underworld!
She lives no more,
O my Father,
In the sunlight.
O sad one,
You have left us
To live motherless!

See, Oh, see her eyelids
And her drooping hands!
Mother, Mother,
Hearken to me, listen,
I beseech you!
I—I—Mother!—
I am calling to you,
Your little bird fallen upon your face!

ADMETUS

She hears not, she sees not. You and I are smitten by a dread calamity.

EUMELUS (*chanting*)

Father, I am a child,
And I am left
Like a lonely ship
By the mother I loved.
Oh! The cruel things I suffer!
And you, little sister,
Suffer with me.

O my Father,
Vain, vain was your wedding,
You did not walk with her
To the end of old age.
She died first;
And your death, O Mother,
Destroys our house.

LEADER

Admetus, you must endure this calamity. You are not the first and will not be the last to lose a noble wife. We all are doomed to die.

ADMETUS

I know it.

Not unawares did this woe swoop down on me; for long it has gnawed at me.

But, since I shall ordain the funeral rites for this dead body, you must be there, and meanwhile let a threnody re-echo to the implacable God of the Underworld. And all you men of Thessaly whom I rule—I order you to share the mourning for this woman with severed hair and black-robed garb. You who yoke the four-horsed chariot and the swift single horses, cut the mane from their necks with your steel.

Let there be no noise of flutes or lyre within the city until twelve moons are fulfilled. Never shall I bury another body so dear to me, never one that has loved me better. From me she deserves all honour, since she alone would die for me!

(*The body of* ALCESTIS *is carried solemnly into the Palace, followed by* ADMETUS, *with bowed head, holding one of his children by each hand. When all have entered, the great doors are quietly shut.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O Daughter of Pelias,
Hail to you in the house of Hades,
In the sunless home where you shall dwell!
Let Hades, the dark-haired God,
Let the old man, Leader of the Dead,
Who sits at the oar and helm,
Know you:
Far, far off is the best of women
Borne beyond the flood of Acheron
In the two-oared boat!

antistrophe 1

Often shall the Muses' servants
Sing of you to the seven-toned
Lyre-shell of the mountain-tortoise,
And praise you with mourning songs at Sparta
When the circling season
Brings back the month Carneius [1]
Under the nightlong upraised moon,
And in bright glad Athens.
Such a theme do you leave by your death
For the music of singers!

strophe 2

Ah! That I had the power
To bring you back to the light
From the dark halls of Hades,
And from the waves of Cocytus
With the oar of the river of hell!
Oh, you only,
O dearest of women,
You only dared give your life
For the life of your lord in Hades!
Light rest the earth above you,
O woman.
If your lord choose another bridal-bed
He shall be hateful to me
As to your own children.

antistrophe 2

When his mother
And the old father that begot him

Would not give their bodies to the earth
For their son's sake,
They dared not deliver him—O cruel!
Though their heads were grey.
But you,
In your lively youth,
Died for him, and are gone from the light!
Ah! might I be joined
With a wife so dear!
But in life such fortune is rare.
How happy were my days with her!

(*From the left* HERACLES *enters. He is black-bearded and of great physical strength; he wears a lion-skin over his shoulders and carries a large club.*)

HERACLES (*with a gesture of salutation*)

Friends, dwellers in the lands of Pherae, do I find Admetus in his home?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The son of Pheres is in his home, O Heracles. But, tell us, what brings you to the land of Thessaly and to the city of Pherae?

HERACLES

I have a task I must achieve for Eurystheus of Tiryns.

LEADER

Where do you go? To what quest are you yoked?

HERACLES

The quest of the four-horsed chariot of Diomedes, the Thracian.

LEADER

But how will you achieve it? Do you know this stranger?

HERACLES

No, I have never been to the land of the Bistones.

LEADER

You cannot obtain the horses without a struggle.

HERACLES

I cannot renounce my labours.

LEADER

You must kill to return, or you will remain there dead.

HERACLES
It will not be the first contest I have risked.

LEADER
And if you conquer the King will you gain anything?

HERACLES
I shall bring back his foals to the lord of Tiryns.

LEADER
It is not easy to thrust the bit into their jaws.

HERACLES
Only if they breathe fire from their nostrils!

LEADER
But they tear men with their swift jaws.

HERACLES
You speak of the food of wild mountain beasts, not of horses.

LEADER
You may see their mangers foul with blood.

HERACLES
Of what father does the breeder boast himself the son?

LEADER
Of Ares, the lord of the gold-rich shield of Thrace!

HERACLES
In this task once more you remind me of my fate, which is ever upon harsh steep ways, since I must join battle with the sons of Ares—first with Lycaon, then with Cycnus, and now in this third contest I am come to match myself with these steeds and their master!

LEADER
But see, the lord of this land, Admetus himself, comes from the house!

(*The central doors of the Palace have opened, and* ADMETUS *comes slowly on the Stage, preceded and followed by guards and attendants. The King has put off all symbols of royalty, and is dressed in black. His long hair is clipped close to his head.* ADMETUS *dissembles his grief throughout this scene, in obedience to the laws of hospitality, which were particularly reverenced in Thessaly.*)

ADMETUS
Hail! Son of Zeus and of the blood of Perseus!

HERACLES
And hail to you, Admetus, lord of the Thessalians!

ADMETUS
May it be so! I know your friendship well.

HERACLES
What means this shorn hair, this mourning robe?

ADMETUS
To-day I must bury a dead body.

HERACLES
May a God avert harm from your children!

ADMETUS
The children I have begotten are alive in the house.

HERACLES
Your father was ripe for death—if it is he has gone?

ADMETUS
He lives—and she who brought me forth, O Heracles.

HERACLES
Your wife—Alcestis—she is not dead?

ADMETUS (*evasively*)
Of her I might make a double answer.

HERACLES
Do you mean that she is dead or alive?

ADMETUS (*ambiguously*)
She is and is not—and for this I grieve.

HERACLES (*perplexed*)
I am no wiser—you speak obscurely.

ADMETUS
Did you not know the fate which must befall her?

HERACLES
I know she submitted to die for you.

ADMETUS
How then can she be alive, having consented to this?

HERACLES
Ah! Do not weep for your wife till that time comes.

ADMETUS
Those who are about to die are dead, and the dead are nothing.

HERACLES
Men hold that to be and not to be are different things.

ADMETUS
You hold for one, Heracles, and I for the other.

HERACLES
Whom, then, do you mourn? Which of your friends is dead?

ADMETUS
A woman. We spoke of her just now.

HERACLES (*mistaking his meaning*)
A stranger? Or one born of your kin?

ADMETUS
A stranger, but one related to this house.

HERACLES
But how, then, did she chance to die in your house?

ADMETUS
When her father died she was sheltered here.

HERACLES
Alas! Would I had not found you in this grief, Admetus!

ADMETUS
What plan are you weaving with those words?

HERACLES
I shall go to the hearth of another friend.

ADMETUS
Not so, O King! This wrong must not be.

HERACLES (*hesitating*)
The coming of a guest is troublesome to those who mourn.

ADMETUS (*decisively*)

The dead are dead. Enter my house.

HERACLES

But it is shameful to feast among weeping friends.

ADMETUS

Well shall put you in the guest-rooms, which are far apart.

HERACLES

Let me go, and I will give you a thousand thanks.

ADMETUS

No, you shall not go to another man's hearth. (*To a servant*) Guide him, and open for him the guest-rooms apart from the house. (HERACLES *enters the Palace by the guests' door; when he has gone in,* ADMETUS *turns to the other servants*) Close the inner door of the courtyard; it is unseemly that guests rejoicing at table should hear lamentations, and be saddened.

(*The attendants go into the Palace.*)

LEADER

What are you about? When such a calamity has fallen upon you, Admetus, have you the heart to entertain a guest? Are you mad?

ADMETUS

And if I had driven away a guest who came to my house and city, would you have praised me more? No, indeed! My misfortune would have been no less, and I inhospitable. One more ill would have been added to those I have if my house were called inhospitable. I myself find him the best of hosts when I enter the thirsty land of Argos.

LEADER

But why did you hide from him the fate that has befallen, if the man came as a friend, as you say?

ADMETUS

Never would he have entered my house if he had guessed my misfortune.

To some, I know, I shall appear senseless in doing this, and they will blame me; but my roof knows not to reject or insult a guest.

(*He goes into the Palace, as the* CHORUS *begins its song.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O house of a bountiful lord,
Ever open to many guests,
The God of Pytho,
Apollo of the beautiful lyre,
Deigned to dwell in you
And to live a shepherd in your lands!
On the slope of the hillsides
He played melodies of mating
On the Pipes of Pan to his herds.

antistrophe 1

And the dappled lynxes fed with them
In joy at your singing;
From the wooded vale of Orthrys
Came a yellow troop of lions;
To the sound of your lyre, O Phoebus,
Danced the dappled fawn
Moving on light feet
Beyond the high-crested pines,
Charmed by your sweet singing.

strophe 2

He dwells in a home most rich in flocks
By the lovely moving Boebian lake.
At the dark stabling-place of the Sun
He takes the sky of the Molossians
As a bourne to his ploughing of fields,
To the soils of his plains;
He bears sway
As far as the harbourless
Coast of the Aegean Sea,
As far as Pelion.

antistrophe 2

Even to-day he opened his house
And received a guest,
Though his eyelids were wet
With tears wept by the corpse
Of a dear bedfellow dead in the house.
For the noble spirit is proclaimed by honour;
All wisdom lies with the good.
I admire him:

And in my soul I know
The devout man shall have joy.

(*The funeral procession of* ALCESTIS *enters from the door of the women's quarters. The body, carried on a bier by men servants, is followed by* ADMETUS *and his two children. Behind them comes a train of attendants and servants carrying the funeral offerings. All are in mourning.* ADMETUS *addresses the* CHORUS.)

ADMETUS

O friendly presence of you men of Pherae! Now that the body is prepared, and the servants bear it on high to the tomb and the fire, do you, as is fitting, salute the dead as she goes forth on her last journey.

(PHERES, *the father of* ADMETUS, *enters, followed by attendants bearing funeral offerings.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But I see your father, tottering with an old man's walk, and his followers bearing in their hands for your wife garments as an offering to the dead.

PHERES

My son, I have come to share your sorrow, for the wife you have lost was indeed noble and virtuous—none can deny it. But these things must be endured, however intolerable they may be.

Take these garments, and let her descend under the earth. Her body must be honoured, for she died to save your life, my son; she has not made me childless, nor left me to be destroyed without you in my hapless old age; and she has given glorious fame to all women by daring so noble a deed! (*He lifts his hand in salutation to the body of* ALCESTIS.) O woman, who saved my son, who raised me up when I had fallen, hail! Be happy in the halls of Hades! I declare it—such marriages are profitable to mankind; otherwise, it is foolish to marry.

ADMETUS (*furiously*)

It was not my wish that you should come to this burial, and I deny that your presence is that of a friend! She shall never wear these garments of yours; she needs not your gifts for her burial. You should have grieved when I was about to die; but you stood aside, and now do you come to wail over a corpse when you, an old man, allowed a young woman to die?

Were you in very truth father of this body of mine? Did she, who claims to be and is called my mother, bring me forth? Or was I bred of a slave's seed and secretly brought to your wife's breast? You have proved

what you are when it comes to the test, and therefore I am not your begotten son; or you surpass all men in cowardice, for, being at the very verge and end of life, you had neither courage nor will to die for your son. But this you left to a woman, a stranger, whom alone I hold as my father and my mother!

Yet it had been a beautiful deed in you to die for your son, and short indeed was the time left you to live. She and I would have lived out our lives, and I should not now be here alone lamenting my misery.

You enjoyed all that a happy man can enjoy—you passed the flower of your age as a king, and in me your son you had an heir to your dominion; you would not have died childless, leaving an orphaned house to be plundered by strangers. You will not say that you abandoned me to death because I dishonoured your old age, for above all I was respectful to you—and this is the gratitude I have from you and my mother!

Beget more sons, and quickly, to cherish your old age and wrap you in a shroud when dead and lay your body out in state! This hand of mine shall not inter you. I am dead to you. I look upon the light of day because another saved me—I say I am her son, and will cherish her old age!

Vainly do old men pray for death, regretting their age and the long span of life. If death draws near, none wants to die, and age is no more a burden to him.

LEADER

Admetus! The present misfortune is enough. Do not provoke your father's spirit.

(ADMETUS *turns angrily to depart, but* PHERES *prevents him.*)

PHERES

My son, do you think you are pursuing some hireling Lydian or Phrygian with your taunts? Do you know I am a Thessalian, a free man lawfully begotten by a Thessalian father? You are over-insolent, and you shall not leave thus, after wounding me with your boyish insults. I indeed begot you, and bred you up to be lord of this land, but I am not bound to die for you. It is not a law of our ancestors or of Hellas that the fathers should die for the children! You were born to live your own life, whether miserable or fortunate; and what is due to you from me you have. You rule over many men, and I shall leave you many wide fields even as I received them from my own father. How, then, have I wronged you? Of what have I robbed you? Do not die for me, any more than I die for you. You love to look upon the light of day—do you think your father hates it? I tell myself that we are a long time underground and that life is short, but sweet.

But you—you strove shamelessly not to die, and you are alive, you shirked your fate by killing her! And you call me a coward, you, the worst of cowards, surpassed by a woman who died for you, pretty boy? And now you insult those who should be dear to you, when they refuse to die for a coward like you!

Be silent! Learn that if you love your life, so do others. If you utter insults, you shall hear many, and true ones too!

LEADER

These insults and those that went before suffice. Old man, cease to revile your son.

ADMETUS (*to* PHERES)

Speak on! I shall refute you. If the truth wounds you when you hear it you should not have wronged me.

PHERES

I should have wronged you far more if I had died for you.

ADMETUS

It is the same then to die an old man and in the flower of life?

PHERES

We should live one life, not two.

ADMETUS

May you live longer than God!

PHERES

Do you curse your parents when they have done you no wrong?

ADMETUS

I see you are in love with long life.

PHERES

But you are not carrying her dead body in place of your own?

ADMETUS

It is the proof of your cowardice, O worst of men.

PHERES

You cannot say she died for me!

ADMETUS

Alas! May you one day need my help.

PHERES

Woo many women, so that more may die for you.

ADMETUS

To your shame be it—you who dared not die.

PHERES

Sweet is the daylight of the Gods, very sweet.

ADMETUS

Your spirit is mean, not a man's.

PHERES

Would you laugh to carry an old man's body to the grave?

ADMETUS

You will die infamous, whenever you die.

PHERES

It will matter little enough to me to hear ill of myself when I am dead!

ADMETUS

Alas! Alas! How full of impudence is old age!

PHERES

She was not impudent, but foolish.

ADMETUS

Go! Leave me to bury her body.

PHERES (*turning away*)

I go. You, her murderer, will bury her—but soon you must render an account to her relatives. Acastus is not a man if he fails to avenge his sister's blood on you!

(PHERES *goes out by the way he entered, followed by his attendants.* ADMETUS *gazes angrily after him.*)

ADMETUS

Go with a curse, you, and she who dwells with you! Grow old, as you ought, childless though you have a child. You shall never return to this house. And if I could renounce your hearth as my father's by heralds, I would do it. But we—since this sorrow must be endured—let us go, and set her body on the funeral pyre.

(*The Procession moves slowly along the stage, and is joined by the* CHORUS. *As they pass, the* LEADER *salutes the body of* ALCESTIS.)

LEADER (*chanting*)

Alas! Alas! You who suffer for your courage, O noblest and best of women, hail! May Hermes of the Dead, may Hades, greet you kindly. If there are rewards for the dead, may you share them as you sit by the bride of the Lord of the Dead!

(*The Procession has filed out. A servant in mourning hurries out from the guests' quarters.*)

SERVANT

Many guests from every land, I know, have come to the Palace of Admetus, and I have set food before them, but never one worse than this guest have I welcomed to the hearth.

First, though he saw our Lord was in mourning, he entered, and dared to pass through the gates. Then, knowing our misfortune, he did not soberly accept what was offered him, but if anything was not served to him he ordered us to bring it. In both hands he took a cup of ivy-wood, and drank the unmixed wine of the dark grape-mother, until he was encompassed and heated with the flame of wine. He crowned his head with myrtle sprays, howling discordant songs. There was he caring nothing for Admetus's misery, and we servants weeping for our Queen; and yet we hid our tear-laden eyes from the guest, for so Admetus had commanded.

And now in the Palace I must entertain this stranger, some villainous thief and brigand, while she, the Queen I mourn, has gone from the house unfollowed, unsaluted, she who was as a mother to me and all us servants, for she sheltered us from a myriad troubles by softening her husband's wrath.

Am I not right, then, to hate this stranger, who came to us in the midst of sorrow?

(HERACLES *comes from the Palace. He is drunkenly merry, with a myrtle wreath on his head, and a large cup and wine-skin in his hands. He staggers a little.*)

HERACLES

Hey, you! Why so solemn and anxious? A servant should not be sullen with guests, but greet them with a cheerful heart.

You see before you a man who is your lord's friend, and you greet him with a gloomy, frowning face, because of your zeal about a strange woman's death. Come here, and let me make you a little wiser!

(*With drunken gravity*) Know the nature of human life? Don't think you do. You couldn't. Listen to me. All mortals must die. Isn't one who knows if he'll be alive to-morrow morning. Who knows where Fortune will lead? Nobody can teach it. Nobody learn it by rules. So, rejoice in

what you hear, and learn from me! Drink! Count each day as it comes as Life—and leave the rest to Fortune. Above all, honour the Love Goddess, sweetest of all the Gods to mortal men, a kindly goddess! Put all the rest aside. Trust in what I say, if you think I speak truth—as I believe. Get rid of this gloom, rise superior to Fortune. Crown yourself with flowers and drink with me, won't you? I know the regular clink of the wine-cup will row you from darkness and gloom to another haven. Mortals should think mortal thoughts. To all solemn and frowning men, life I say is not life, but a disaster.

SERVANT

We know all that, but what we endure here to-day is far indeed from gladness and laughter.

HERACLES

But the dead woman was a stranger. Lament not overmuch, then, for the Lords of this Palace are still alive.

SERVANT

How, alive? Do you not know the misery of this house?

HERACLES

Your lord did not lie to me?

SERVANT

He goes too far in hospitality!

HERACLES

But why should I suffer for a stranger's death?

SERVANT

It touches this house only too nearly.

HERACLES

Did he hide some misfortune from me?

SERVANT

Go in peace! The miseries of our lords concern us.

HERACLES

That speech does not imply mourning for a stranger!

SERVANT

No, or I should not have been disgusted to see you drinking.

HERACLES

Have I then been basely treated by my host?

SERVANT

You did not come to this house at a welcome hour. We are in mourning. You see my head is shaved and the black garments I wear.

HERACLES

But who, then, is dead? One of the children? The old father?

SERVANT

O stranger, Admetus no longer has a wife.

HERACLES

What! And yet I was received in this way?

SERVANT

He was ashamed to send you away from his house.

HERACLES

O hapless one! What a wife you have lost!

SERVANT

Not she alone, but all of us are lost.

HERACLES (*now completely sobered*)

I felt there was something when I saw his tear-wet eyes, his shaven head, his distracted look. But he persuaded me he was taking the body of a stranger to the grave. Against my will I entered these gates, and drank in the home of this generous man—and he in such grief! And shall I drink at such a time with garlands of flowers on my head? You, why did you not tell me that such misery had come upon this house? Where is he burying her? Where shall I find him?

SERVANT

Beside the straight road which leads to Larissa you will see a tomb of polished stone outside the walls.

(*Returns to the servants' quarters*)

HERACLES

O heart of me, much-enduring heart, O right arm, now indeed must you show what son was born to Zeus by Alcmena, the Tirynthian, daughter of Electryon! For I must save this dead woman, and bring back Alcestis to this house as a grace to Admetus.

I shall watch for Death, the black-robed Lord of the Dead, and I know I shall find him near the tomb, drinking the blood of the sacrifices. If I can leap upon him from an ambush, seize him, grasp him in my arms, no power in the world shall tear his bruised sides from me until he has yielded up this woman. If I miss my prey, if he does not come near the

bleeding sacrifice, I will go down to Kore and her lord in their sunless dwelling, and I will make my entreaty to them, and I know they will give me Alcestis to bring back to the hands of the host who welcomed me, who did not repulse me from his house, though he was smitten with a heavy woe which most nobly he hid from me! Where would be a warmer welcome in Thessaly or in all the dwellings of Hellas?

He shall not say he was generous to an ingrate!

(HERACLES *goes out. Presently* ADMETUS *and his attendants, followed by the* CHORUS, *return from the burial of* ALCESTIS.)

ADMETUS (*chanting*)

Alas!

Hateful approach, hateful sight of my widowed house! Oh me! Oh me! Alas! Whither shall I go? Where rest? What can I say? What refrain from saying? Why can I not die? Indeed my mother bore me for a hapless fate. I envy the dead, I long to be with them, theirs are the dwellings where I would be. Without pleasure I look upon the light of day and set my feet upon the earth—so precious a hostage has Death taken from me to deliver unto Hades!

CHORUS

(*chanting responsively with* ADMETUS)

Go forward,
Enter your house.

ADMETUS

Alas!

CHORUS

Your grief deserves our tears.

ADMETUS

O Gods!

CHORUS

I know you have entered into sorrow.

ADMETUS

Woe! Woe!

CHORUS

Yet you bring no aid to the dead.

ADMETUS

Oh me! Oh me!

CHORUS

Heavy shall it be for you
Never to look again
On the face of the woman you love.

ADMETUS

You bring to my mind the grief that breaks my heart. What sorrow is worse for a man than the loss of such a woman? I would I had never married, never shared my house with her. I envy the wifeless and the childless. They live but one life—what is suffering to them? But the sickness of children, bridal-beds ravished by Death —dreadful! when we might be wifeless and childless to the end.

CHORUS

Chance, dreadful Chance, has stricken you.

ADMETUS

Alas!

CHORUS

But you set no limit to your grief.

ADMETUS

Ah! Gods!

CHORUS

A heavy burden to bear, and yet . . .

ADMETUS

Woe! Woe!

CHORUS

Courage! You are not the first to lose . . .

ADMETUS

Oh me! Oh me!

CHORUS

A wife.
Different men
Fate crushes with different blows.

ADMETUS

O long grief and mourning for those beloved under the earth!
Why did you stay me from casting myself into the hollow grave to lie down for ever in death by the best of women? Two lives, not one, had then been seized by Hades, most faithful one to the other; and together we should have crossed the lake of the Underworld.

CHORUS

A son most worthy of tears
Was lost to one of my house,
Yet, childless, he suffered with courage,
Though the white was thick in his hair
And his days were far-spent!

ADMETUS

O visage of my house! How shall I enter you? How shall I dwell in you, now that Fate has turned its face from me? How great is the change! Once, of old, I entered my house with marriage-songs and the torches of Pelion, holding a loved woman by the hand, followed by a merry crowd shouting good wishes to her who is dead and to me, because we had joined our lives, being both noble and born of noble lines. To-day, in place of marriage-songs are lamentations; instead of white garments I am clad in mourning, to return to my house and a solitary bed.

CHORUS

Grief has fallen upon you
In the midst of a happy life
Untouched by misfortune.
But your life and your spirit are safe.
She is dead,
She has left your love.
Is this so new?
Ere now many men
Death has severed from wives.

ADMETUS (*speaking*)

O friends, whatsoever may be thought by others, to me it seems that my wife's fate is happier than mine. Now, no pain ever shall touch her again; she has reached the noble end of all her sufferings. But I, I who should have died, I have escaped my fate, only to drag out a wretched life. Only now do I perceive it.[2]

How shall I summon strength to enter this house? Whom shall I greet? Who will greet me in joy at my coming? Whither shall I turn my steps? I shall be driven forth by solitude when I see my bed widowed of my wife, empty the chairs on which she sat, a dusty floor beneath my roof, my children falling at my knees and calling for their mother, and the servants lamenting for the noble lady lost from the house!

Such will be my life within the house. Without, I shall be driven from marriage-feasts and gatherings of the women of Thessaly. I shall not endure to look upon my wife's friends. Those who hate me will say: 'See

how he lives in shame, the man who dared not die, the coward who gave his wife to Hades in his stead! Is that a man? He hates his parents, yet he himself refused to die!'

This evil fame I have added to my other sorrows. O my friends, what then avails it that I live, if I must live in misery and shame?

(*He covers his head with his robe, and crouches in abject misery on the steps of his Palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

I have lived with the Muses
And on lofty heights:
Many doctrines have I learned;
But Fate is above us all.
Nothing avails against Fate—
Neither the Thracian tablets
Marked with Orphic symbols,
Nor the herbs given by Phoebus
To the children of Asclepius
To heal men of their sickness.

antistrophe 1

None can come near to her altars,
None worship her statues;
She regards not our sacrifice.
O sacred goddess,
Bear no more hardly upon me
Than in days overpast!
With a gesture Zeus judges,
But the sentence is yours.
Hard iron yields to your strength;
Your fierce will knows not gentleness.

strophe 2

And the Goddess has bound you
Ineluctably in the gyves of her hands.
Yield.
Can your tears give life to the dead?
For the sons of the Gods
Swoon in the shadow of Death.
Dear was she in our midst,
Dear still among the dead,
For the noblest of women was she
Who lay in your bed.

antistrophe 2

Ah!
Let the grave of your spouse
Be no more counted as a tomb,
But revered as the Gods,
And greeted by all who pass by!
The wanderer shall turn from his path,
Saying: 'She died for her lord;
A blessed spirit she is now.
Hail, O sacred lady, be our friend!'
Thus shall men speak of her.

(ADMETUS *is still crouched on the Palace steps, when* HERACLES *enters from the side, leading a veiled woman.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But see! The son of Alcmena, as I think, comes to your house.

(ADMETUS *uncovers his head, and faces the new-comer.*)

HERACLES

Admetus, a man should speak freely to his friends, and not keep reproaches silent in his heart. Since I was near you in your misfortune, I should have wished to show myself your friend. But you did not tell me the dead body was your wife's, and you took me into your house as if you were in mourning only for a stranger. And I put a garland of flowers upon my head, and poured wine-offerings to the Gods, when your house was filled with lamentation. I blame you, yes, I blame you for this—but I will not upbraid you in your misfortune.

Why I turned back and am here, I shall tell you. Take and keep this woman for me until I have slain the King of the Bistones and return here with the horses of Thrace. If ill happens to me—may I return safely!—I give her to you to serve in your house.

With much striving I won her to my hands. On my way I found public games, worthy of athletes, and I have brought back this woman whom I won as the prize of victory. The winners of the easy tests had horses; heads of cattle were given to those who won in boxing and wrestling. Then came a woman as a prize. Since I was present, it would have been shameful for me to miss this glorious gain. Therefore, as I said, you must take care of this woman, whom I bring to you, not as one stolen but as the prize of my efforts. Perhaps in time you will approve of what I do.

ADMETUS

Not from disdain, nor to treat you as a foe, did I conceal my wife's fate from you. But if you had turned aside to another man's hearth, one

more grief had been added to my sorrow. It was enough that I should weep my woe.

This woman—O King, I beg it may be thus—enjoin some other Thessalian, one who is not in sorrow, to guard her. In Pherae there are many to welcome you. Do not remind me of my grief. Seeing her in my house, I could not restrain my tears. Add not a further anguish to my pain, for what I suffer is too great. And then—where could I harbour a young woman in my house? For she is young—I see by her clothes and jewels. Could she live with the men under my roof? How, then, could she remain chaste, if she moved to and fro among the young men? Heracles, it is not easy to restrain the young. . . . I am thinking of your interests. . . . Must I take her to my dead wife's room? How could I endure her to enter that bed? I fear a double reproach—from my people, who would accuse me of betraying my saviour to slip into another woman's bed, and from my dead wife, who deserves my respect, for which I must take care.

O woman, whosoever you may be, you have the form of Alcestis, and your body is like hers.

Ah! By all the Gods, take her from my sight! Do not insult a broken man. When I look upon her—she seems my wife—my heart is torn asunder—tears flow from my eyes. Miserable creature that I am, now I taste the bitterness of my sorrow.

LEADER

I do not praise this meeting; but, whatever happens, we must accept the gifts of the Gods.

HERACLES

Oh, that I might bring your wife back into the light of day from the dwelling of the Under-Gods, as a gift of grace to you!

ADMETUS

I know you would wish this—but to what end? The dead cannot return to the light of day.

HERACLES

Do not exaggerate, but bear this with decorum.

ADMETUS

Easier to advise than bear the test.

HERACLES

How will it aid you to lament for ever?

ADMETUS
I know—but my love whirls me away.

HERACLES
Love for the dead leads us to tears.

ADMETUS
I am overwhelmed beyond words.

HERACLES
You have lost a good wife—who denies it?

ADMETUS
So that for me there is no more pleasure in life.

HERACLES
Time will heal this open wound.

ADMETUS
You might say Time, if Time were death!

HERACLES
Another woman, a new marriage, shall console you.

ADMETUS
Oh, hush! What have said? A thing unbelievable!

HERACLES
What! You will not marry? Your bed will remain widowed?

ADMETUS
No other woman shall ever lie at my side.

HERACLES
Do you think that avails the dead?

ADMETUS
Wherever she may be, I must do her honour.

HERACLES
I praise you—but men will call you mad.

ADMETUS
Yet never more shall I be called a bridegroom.

HERACLES
I praise your faithful love to your wife.

ADMETUS
May I die if I betray her even when dead!

HERACLES (*offering him the veiled woman's hand*)
Receive her then into your noble house.

ADMETUS
No, by Zeus who begot you, no!

HERACLES
Yet you will do wrong if you do not take her.

ADMETUS
If I do it, remorse will tear my heart.

HERACLES
Yield—perhaps it will be a good thing for you.

ADMETUS
Ah! If only you had not won her in the contest!

HERACLES
But I conquered—and you conquered with me.

ADMETUS
It is true—but let the woman go hence.

HERACLES
She shall go, if she must. But first—ought she to go?

ADMETUS
She must—unless it would anger you.

HERACLES
There is good reason for my zeal.

ADMETUS
You have conquered then—but not for my pleasure.

HERACLES
One day you will praise me for it—be persuaded.

ADMETUS (*to his attendants*)
Lead her in, since she must be received in this house.

HERACLES
No, I cannot leave such a woman to servants.

ADMETUS

Then lead her in yourself, if you wish.

HERACLES

I must leave her in your hands.

ADMETUS

I must not touch her—let her go into the house.

HERACLES

I trust only in your right hand.

ADMETUS

O King, you force me to this against my will.

HERACLES

Put forth your hand and take this woman.

ADMETUS (*turning aside his head*)

It is held out.

HERACLES

As if you were cutting off a Gorgon's head! Do you hold her?

ADMETUS

Yes.

HERACLES

Then keep her. You shall not deny that the son of Zeus is a grateful guest. (*Takes off the veil and shows* ALCESTIS.) Look at her, and see if she is not like your wife. And may joy put an end to all your sorrow!

ADMETUS (*drops her hand and starts back*)

O Gods! What am I to say? Unhoped-for wonder! Do I really look upon my wife? Or I am snared in the mockery of a God?

HERACLES

No, you look upon your wife indeed.

ADMETUS

Beware! May it not be some phantom from the Underworld?

HERACLES

Do not think your guest a sorcerer.

ADMETUS

But do I indeed look upon the wife I buried?

HERACLES
Yes—but I do not wonder at your mistrust.

ADMETUS
Can I touch, speak to her, as my living wife?

HERACLES
Speak to her—you have all you desired.

ADMETUS (*taking* ALCESTIS *in his arms*)
O face and body of the dearest of women! I have you once more, when I thought I should never see you again!

HERACLES
You have her—may the envy of the Gods be averted from you!

ADMETUS
O noble son of greatest Zeus, fortune be yours, and may your Father guard you! But how did you bring her back from the Underworld to the light of day?

HERACLES
By fighting with the spirit who was her master.

ADMETUS
Then did you contend with Death?

HERACLES
I hid by the tomb and leaped upon him.

ADMETUS
But why is she speechless?

HERACLES
You may not hear her voice until she is purified from her consecration to the Lower Gods, and until the third dawn has risen. Lead her in.
And you, Admetus, show as ever a good man's welcome to your guests.
Farewell! I go to fulfil the task set me by the King, the son of Sthenelus.

ADMETUS
Stay with us, and share our hearth.

HERACLES
That may be hereafter, but now I must be gone in haste.
(HERACLES *departs.*)

ADMETUS (*gazing after him*)

Good fortune to you, and come back here! (*To the* CHORUS) In all the city and in the four quarters of Thessaly let there be choruses to rejoice at this good fortune, and let the altars smoke with the flesh of oxen in sacrifice! To-day we have changed the past for a better life. I am happy.

(*He leads* ALCESTIS *into the Palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Spirits have many shapes,[3]
Many strange things are performed by the Gods.
The expected does not always happen,
And God makes a way for the unexpected.
So ends this action.

NOTES FOR ALCESTIS

THE translation of Richard Aldington, which appeared in 1930, is noteworthy particularly because of its rendering of the choral passages. In general his scheme of translation is that followed by P. E. More in his version of *Prometheus Bound*. The dialogue portions are done in prose, while the lyric sections are marked by verse of effective simplicity and restraint. Some portions of Aldington's stage directions have been deleted, since they contain information which appears elsewhere in this book. Unfortunately Aldington has omitted the following lines of the original: 231–232, 505–506, 699–701, and 1138.

1. This is the Spartan name for the month which corresponds to parts of August and September.

2. At this point Admetus becomes aware of the full implications of the situation.

3. These lines are found likewise at the conclusion of the *Helen*, *The Bacchae*, *Andromache*, and, with a slight addition, the *Medea*.

II
MEDEA

Characters in the Play

Nurse of Medea
Attendant on her Children
Medea
Chorus of Corinthian Women
Creon, *King of Corinth*
Jason
Aegeus, *King of Athens*
Messenger
The two Sons of Jason and Medea

INTRODUCTION

IN THE *Medea*, produced in 431 B.C., seven years after the *Alcestis*, Euripides has turned to the familiar and romantic myth of the Argonauts. Jason has been ordered by his wicked uncle, Pelias, to procure the golden fleece owned and jealously guarded by Aeëtes, king of far-off Colchis. He therefore gathered a band of Greek heroes and demi-gods, built the Argo, the first ship of Greece, and sailed on the expedition which was intended to prove fatal to its commander. Jason gained possession of the fleece, but only through the assistance of the Colchian princess, Medea, who had fallen deeply in love with him. She was endowed with the supernatural powers of a sorceress, which she did not scruple to use on Jason's behalf, and she left her native land with Jason, after having deceived her father and slain her brother that Jason might succeed in his quest. Back in the court of Pelias, the usurping king of Iolcos, where Jason held the rightful claim to the throne, Medea acted again to abet her lord. On this occasion, she contrived the death of Pelias, but Jason was unable to place himself in power. The ill-starred pair, with the two sons who had been born to them, fled in exile to Corinth. It is here that the action of our play commences, and the situation at the very opening foreshadows in intensity the remainder of the play, for Jason has deserted Medea, and has wedded the daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth.

Euripides in the course of the tragedy submits his two leading characters to a penetrating psychological analysis. Jason is portrayed as a supreme egotist, who resents being under such great obligation as he is to Medea, yet who has not been unwilling to accept the benefits which have accrued to him through Medea's crimes. There may be a certain slight degree of genuineness in his defence, that he is marrying the Corinthian princess in order to consolidate not only his own position in their new home, but also that of Medea and their children. In contrast, Medea has but a single guiding passion, and that is her love for Jason. She committed every crime for Jason, because she loved him and desired to bind him closer to herself. And now that he has abandoned her, all the intensity of her love has changed violently into an intensity of hate and a desire for revenge. The means she employs are horrifying. By killing Creon

and his daughter, through her gifts of the poisoned robe and chaplet (the device which also appears in *The Trachiniae* of Sophocles), and by slaying her own children, Medea renders Jason abjectly desolate. The depth of her passion for vengeance is intensified when pathetically overwhelmed by love for her children she momentarily weakens in her resolve to kill them. Her final act therefore is presented with redoubled force.

Critics have been troubled by the dramatic function of the scene in which Aegeus appears and offers an ultimate refuge for Medea. The scene may be more integral to the play than these critics have suspected because in it the childlessness of Aegeus seems to suggest to Medea that her revenge take the form of killing her children, in order that Jason may suffer in like fashion. The playwright has also been censured because he permits Medea to escape in the dragon-chariot at the end. Perhaps an answer may lie in the fact that, horrible though Medea's acts are, still she commands a modicum of sympathy, for Jason's injustice to her has driven her to these extremes, and by allowing her to escape the poet partially justifies her deeds. Furthermore, Euripides may have been influenced by the existence of a cult of Medea's children at Corinth, and may have resolved his play so that it would accord with the traditions of the cult. Whatever may be the explanation of these supposed flaws, the play itself does display almost unrivalled psychological and emotional power. Ultimately, the abortive alliance between Jason and Medea has destroyed them both.

MEDEA

(SCENE:—*Before* MEDEA'S *house in Corinth, near the palace of* CREON. *The* NURSE *enters from the house.*)

NURSE

AH! WOULD to Heaven the good ship Argo ne'er had sped its course to the Colchian land through the misty blue Symplegades, nor ever in the glens of Pelion the pine been felled to furnish with oars the chieftain's hands, who went to fetch the golden fleece for Pelias; for then would my own mistress Medea never have sailed to the turrets of Iolcos, her soul with love for Jason smitten, nor would she have beguiled the daughters of Pelias to slay their father and come to live here in the land of Corinth with her husband and children, where her exile found favour with the citizens to whose land she had come, and in all things of her own accord was she at one with Jason, the greatest safeguard this when wife and husband do agree; but now their love is all turned to hate, and tenderest ties are weak. For Jason hath betrayed his own children and my mistress dear for the love of a royal bride, for he hath wedded the daughter of Creon, lord of this land. While Medea, his hapless wife, thus scorned, appeals to the oaths he swore, recalls the strong pledge his right hand gave, and bids heaven be witness what requital she is finding from Jason. And here she lies fasting, yielding her body to her grief, wasting away in tears ever since she learnt that she was wronged by her husband, never lifting her eye nor raising her face from off the ground; and she lends as deaf an ear to her friend's warning as if she were a rock or ocean billow, save when she turns her snow-white neck aside and softly to herself bemoans her father dear, her country and her home, which she gave up to come hither with the man who now holds her in dishonour. She, poor lady, hath by sad experience learnt how good a thing it is never to quit one's native land. And she hates her children now and feels no joy at seeing them; I fear she may contrive some untoward scheme; for her mood is dangerous nor will she brook her cruel treatment; full well I know her, and I much do dread that she will plunge the keen sword through their hearts, stealing without a word into the chamber where their marriage couch is spread, or

else that she will slay the prince and bridegroom too, and so find some calamity still more grievous than the present; for dreadful is her wrath; verily the man that doth incur her hate will have no easy task to raise o'er her a song of triumph. Lo! where her sons come hither from their childish sports; little they reck of their mother's woes, for the soul of the young is no friend to sorrow.

(*The* ATTENDANT *leads in* MEDEA'S *children.*)

ATTENDANT

Why dost thou, so long my lady's own handmaid, stand here at the gate alone, loudly lamenting to thyself the piteous tale? how comes it that Medea will have thee leave her to herself?

NURSE

Old man, attendant on the sons of Jason, our masters' fortunes when they go awry make good slaves grieve and touch their hearts. Oh! I have come to such a pitch of grief that there stole a yearning wish upon me to come forth hither and proclaim to heaven and earth my mistress's hard fate.

ATTENDANT

What! has not the poor lady ceased yet from her lamentation?

NURSE

Would I were as thou art! the mischief is but now beginning; it has not reached its climax yet.

ATTENDANT

O foolish one, if I may call my mistress such a name; how little she recks of evils yet more recent!

NURSE

What mean'st, old man? grudge not to tell me.

ATTENDANT

'Tis naught; I do repent me even of the words I have spoken.

NURSE

Nay, by thy beard I conjure thee, hide it not from thy fellow-slave; I will be silent, if need be, on that text.

ATTENDANT

I heard one say, pretending not to listen as I approached the place where our greybeards sit playing draughts near Pirene's sacred spring, that Creon, the ruler of this land, is bent on driving these children and their mother from the boundaries of Corinth; but I know not whether the news is to be relied upon, and would fain it were not.

NURSE

What! will Jason brook such treatment of his sons, even though he be at variance with their mother?

ATTENDANT

Old ties give way to new; he bears no longer any love to this family.

NURSE

Undone, it seems, are we, if to old woes fresh ones we add, ere we have drained the former to the dregs.

ATTENDANT

Hold thou thy peace, say not a word of this; 'tis no time for our mistress to learn hereof.

NURSE

O children, do ye hear how your father feels towards you? Perdition catch him, but no! he is my master still; yet is he proved a very traitor to his nearest and dearest.

ATTENDANT

And who 'mongst men is not? Art learning only now, that every single man cares for himself more than for his neighbour, some from honest motives, others for mere gain's sake? seeing that to indulge his passion their father has ceased to love these children.

NURSE

Go, children, within the house; all will be well. Do thou keep them as far away as may be, and bring them not near their mother in her evil hour. For ere this have I seen her eyeing them savagely, as though she were minded to do them some hurt, and well I know she will not cease from her fury till she have pounced on some victim. At least may she turn her hand against her foes, and not against her friends.

MEDEA (*chanting within*)

Ah, me! a wretched suffering woman I! O would that I could die!

NURSE (*chanting*)

'Tis as I said, my dear children; wild fancies stir your mother's heart, wild fury goads her on. Into the house without delay, come not near her eye, approach her not, beware her savage mood, the fell tempest of her reckless heart. In, in with what speed ye may. For 'tis plain she will soon redouble her fury; that cry is but the herald of the gathering storm-cloud whose lightning soon will flash; what will her proud restless soul, in the anguish of despair, be guilty of?

(*The* ATTENDANT *takes the children into the house.*)

MEDEA (*chanting within*)

Ah, me! the agony I have suffered, deep enough to call for these laments! Curse you and your father too, ye children damned, sons of a doomed mother! Ruin seize the whole family!

NURSE (*chanting*)

Ah me! ah me! the pity of it! Why, pray, do thy children share their father's crime? Why hatest thou them? Woe is you, poor children, how do I grieve for you lest ye suffer some outrage! Strange are the tempers of princes, and maybe because they seldom have to obey, and mostly lord it over others, change they their moods with difficulty. 'Tis better then to have been trained to live on equal terms. Be it mine to reach old age, not in proud pomp, but in security! Moderation wins the day first as a better word for men to use, and likewise it is far the best course for them to pursue; but greatness that doth o'erreach itself, brings no blessing to mortal men; but pays a penalty of greater ruin whenever fortune is wroth with a family.

(*The* CHORUS *enters. The following lines between the* NURSE, CHORUS, *and* MEDEA *are sung.*)

CHORUS

I heard the voice, uplifted loud, of our poor Colchian lady, nor yet is she quiet; speak, aged dame, for as I stood by the house with double gates I heard a voice of weeping from within, and I do grieve, lady, for the sorrows of this house, for it hath won my love.

NURSE

'Tis a house no more; all that is passed away long since; a royal bride keeps Jason at her side, while our mistress pines away in her bower, finding no comfort for her soul in aught her friends can say.

MEDEA (*within*)

Oh, oh! Would that Heaven's levin bolt would cleave this head in twain! What gain is life to me? Woe, woe is me! O, to die and win release, quitting this loathed existence!

CHORUS

Didst hear, O Zeus, thou earth, and thou, O light, the piteous note of woe the hapless wife is uttering? How shall a yearning for that insatiate resting-place ever hasten for thee, poor reckless one, the end that death alone can bring? Never pray for that. And if thy lord prefers a fresh love, be not angered with him for that; Zeus will judge 'twixt thee and him herein. Then mourn not for thy husband's loss too much, nor waste thyself away.

MEDEA (*within*)

Great Themis, and husband of Themis, behold what I am suffering now, though I did bind that accursed one, my husband, by strong oaths to me! O, to see him and his bride some day brought to utter destruction, they and their house with them, for that they presume to wrong me thus unprovoked. O my father, my country, that I have left to my shame, after slaying my own brother.

NURSE

Do ye hear her words, how loudly she adjures Themis, oft invoked, and Zeus, whom men regard as keeper of their oaths? On no mere trifle surely will our mistress spend her rage.

CHORUS

Would that she would come forth for us to see, and listen to the words of counsel we might give, if haply she might lay aside the fierce fury of her wrath, and her temper stern. Never be my zeal at any rate denied my friends! But go thou and bring her hither outside the house, and tell her this our friendly thought; haste thee ere she do some mischief to those inside the house, for this sorrow of hers is mounting high.

NURSE

This will I do; but I doubt whether I shall persuade my mistress; still willingly will I undertake this trouble for you; albeit, she glares upon her servants with the look of a lioness with cubs, whenso anyone draws nigh to speak to her. Wert thou to call the men of old time rude uncultured boors thou wouldst not err, seeing that they devised their hymns for festive occasions, for banquets, and to grace the board, a pleasure to catch the ear, shed o'er our life, but no man hath found a way to allay hated grief by music and the minstrel's varied strain, whence arise slaughters and fell strokes of fate to o'erthrow the homes of men. And yet this were surely a gain, to heal men's wounds by music's spell, but why tune they their idle song where rich banquets are spread? For of itself doth the rich banquet, set before them, afford to men delight.

CHORUS

I heard a bitter cry of lamentation! loudly, bitterly she calls on the traitor of her marriage bed, her perfidious spouse; by grievous wrongs oppressed she invokes Themis, bride of Zeus, witness of oaths, who brought her unto Hellas, the land that fronts the strand of Asia, o'er the sea by night through ocean's boundless gate.

(*As the* CHORUS *finishes its song,* MEDEA *enters from the house.*)

MEDEA

From the house I have come forth, Corinthian ladies, for fear lest you be blaming me; for well I know that amongst men many by showing pride have gotten them an ill name and a reputation for indifference, both those who shun men's gaze and those who move amid the stranger crowd, and likewise they who choose a quiet walk in life. For there is no just discernment in the eyes of men, for they, or ever they have surely learnt their neighbour's heart, loathe him at first sight, though never wronged by him; and so a stranger most of all should adopt a city's views; nor do I commend that citizen, who, in the stubbornness of his heart, from churlishness resents the city's will.

But on me hath fallen this unforeseen disaster, and sapped my life; ruined I am, and long to resign the boon of existence, kind friends, and die. For he who was all the world to me, as well thou knowest, hath turned out the worst of men, my own husband. Of all things that have life and sense we women are the most hapless creatures; first must we buy a husband at a great price, and o'er ourselves a tyrant set which is an evil worse than the first; and herein lies the most important issue, whether our choice be good or bad. For divorce is not honourable to women, nor can we disown our lords. Next must the wife, coming as she does to ways and customs new, since she hath not learnt the lesson in her home, have a diviner's eye to see how best to treat the partner of her life. If haply we perform these tasks with thoroughness and tact, and the husband live with us, without resenting the yoke, our life is a happy one; if not, 'twere best to die. But when a man is vexed with what he finds indoors, he goeth forth and rids his soul of its disgust, betaking him to some friend or comrade of like age; whilst we must needs regard his single self.

And yet they say we live secure at home, while they are at the wars, with their sorry reasoning, for I would gladly take my stand in battle array three times o'er, than once give birth. But enough! this language suits not thee as it does me; thou hast a city here, a father's house, some joy in life, and friends to share thy thoughts, but I am destitute, without a city, and therefore scorned by my husband, a captive I from a foreign shore, with no mother, brother, or kinsman in whom to find a new haven of refuge from this calamity. Wherefore this one boon and only this I wish to win from thee,—thy silence, if haply I can some way or means devise to avenge me on my husband for this cruel treatment, and on the man who gave to him his daughter, and on her who is his wife. For though a woman be timorous enough in all else, and as regards courage, a coward at the mere sight of steel, yet in the moment she finds her honour wronged, no heart is filled with deadlier thoughts than hers.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This will I do; for thou wilt be taking a just vengeance on thy husband, Medea. That thou shouldst mourn thy lot surprises me not. But lo! I see Creon, king of this land coming hither, to announce some new resolve.

(CREON *enters, with his retinue.*)

CREON

Hark thee, Medea, I bid thee take those sullen looks and angry thoughts against thy husband forth from this land in exile, and with thee take both thy children and that without delay, for I am judge in this sentence, and I will not return unto my house till I banish thee beyond the borders of the land.

MEDEA

Ah, me! now is utter destruction come upon me, unhappy that I am! For my enemies are bearing down on me full sail, nor have I any landing-place to come at in my trouble. Yet for all my wretched plight I will ask thee, Creon, wherefore dost thou drive me from the land?

CREON

I fear thee,—no longer need I veil my dread 'neath words,—lest thou devise against my child some cureless ill. Many things contribute to this fear of mine; thou art a witch by nature, expert in countless sorceries, and thou art chafing for the loss of thy husband's affection. I hear, too, so they tell me, that thou dost threaten the father of the bride, her husband, and herself with some mischief; wherefore I will take precautions ere our troubles come. For 'tis better for me to incur thy hatred now, lady, than to soften my heart and bitterly repent it hereafter.

MEDEA

Alas! this is not now the first time, but oft before, O Creon, hath my reputation injured me and caused sore mischief. Wherefore whoso is wise in his generation ought never to have his children taught to be too clever; for besides the reputation they get for idleness, they purchase bitter odium from the citizens. For if thou shouldst import new learning amongst dullards, thou wilt be thought a useless trifler, void of knowledge; while if thy fame in the city o'ertops that of the pretenders to cunning knowledge, thou wilt win their dislike. I too myself share in this ill-luck. Some think me clever and hate me, others say I am too reserved, and some the very reverse; others find me hard to please and not so very clever after all. Be that as it may, thou dost fear me lest I bring on thee something to mar thy harmony. Fear me not, Creon, my position scarce is such that I should seek to quarrel with princes. Why should I, for how hast thou injured me? Thou hast betrothed thy daughter where thy fancy prompted thee. No, 'tis my husband I hate, though I doubt not thou hast acted

wisely herein. And now I grudge not thy prosperity; betroth thy child, good luck to thee, but let me abide in this land, for though I have been wronged I will be still and yield to my superiors.

CREON

Thy words are soft to hear, but much I dread lest thou art devising some mischief in thy heart, and less than ever do I trust thee now; for a cunning woman, and man likewise, is easier to guard against when quick-tempered than when taciturn. Nay, begone at once! speak me no speeches, for this is decreed, nor hast thou any art whereby thou shalt abide amongst us, since thou hatest me.

MEDEA

O, say not so! by thy knees and by thy daughter newly-wed, I do implore!

CREON

Thou wastest words; thou wilt never persuade me.

MEDEA

What, wilt thou banish me, and to my prayers no pity yield?

CREON

I will, for I love not thee above my own family.

MEDEA

O my country! what fond memories I have of thee in this hour!

CREON

Yea, for I myself love my city best of all things save my children.

MEDEA

Ah me! ah me! to mortal man how dread a scourge is love!

CREON

That, I deem, is according to the turn our fortunes take.

MEDEA

O Zeus! let not the author of these my troubles escape thee.

CREON

Begone, thou silly woman, and free me from my toil.

MEDEA

The toil is mine, no lack of it.

CREON

Soon wilt thou be thrust out forcibly by the hand of servants.

MEDEA

Not that, not that, I do entreat thee, Creon!

CREON

Thou wilt cause disturbance yet, it seems.

MEDEA

I will begone; I ask thee not this boon to grant.

CREON

Why then this violence? why dost thou not depart?

MEDEA

Suffer me to abide this single day and devise some plan for the manner of my exile, and means of living for my children, since their father cares not to provide his babes therewith. Then pity them; thou too hast children of thine own; thou needs must have a kindly heart. For my own lot I care naught, though I an exile am, but for those babes I weep, that they should learn what sorrow means.

CREON

Mine is a nature anything but harsh; full oft by showing pity have I suffered shipwreck; and now albeit I clearly see my error, yet shalt thou gain this request, lady; but I do forewarn thee, if to-morrow's rising sun shall find thee and thy children within the borders of this land, thou diest; my word is spoken and it will not lie. So now, if abide thou must, stay this one day only, for in it thou canst not do any of the fearful deeds I dread.

(CREON *and his retinue go out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah! poor lady, woe is thee! Alas, for thy sorrows! Whither wilt thou turn? What protection, what home or country to save thee from thy troubles wilt thou find? O Medea, in what a hopeless sea of misery heaven hath plunged thee!

MEDEA

On all sides sorrow pens me in. Who shall gainsay this? But all is not yet lost! think not so. Still are there troubles in store for the new bride, and for her bridegroom no light toil. Dost think I would ever have fawned on yonder man, unless to gain some end or form some scheme? Nay, I would not so much as have spoken to him or touched him with my hand. But he has in folly so far stepped in that, though he might have checked my plot by banishing me from the land, he hath allowed me to abide this day, in which I will lay low in death three of my enemies—a father and his daughter and my husband too. Now, though I have many ways to compass their death, I am not sure, friends, which I am to try first. Shall I set

fire to the bridal mansion, or plunge the whetted sword through their hearts, softly stealing into the chamber where their couch is spread? One thing stands in my way. If I am caught making my way into the chamber, intent on my design, I shall be put to death and cause my foes to mock. 'Twere best to take the shortest way—the way we women are most skilled in—by poison to destroy them. Well, suppose them dead; what city will receive me? What friendly host will give me a shelter in his land, a home secure, and save my soul alive? None. So I will wait yet a little while in case some tower of defence rise up for me; then will I proceed to this bloody deed in crafty silence; but if some unexpected mischance drive me forth, I will with mine own hand seize the sword, e'en though I die for it, and slay them, and go forth on my bold path of daring. By that dread queen whom I revere before all others and have chosen to share my task, by Hecate who dwells within my inmost chamber, not one of them shall wound my heart and rue it not. Bitter and sad will I make their marriage for them; bitter shall be the wooing of it, bitter my exile from the land. Up, then, Medea, spare not the secrets of thy art in plotting and devising; on to the danger. Now comes a struggle needing courage. Dost see what thou art suffering? 'Tis not for thee to be a laughing-stock to the race of Sisyphus by reason of this wedding of Jason, sprung, as thou art, from a noble sire, and of the Sun-god's race. Thou hast cunning; and, more than this, we women, though by nature little apt for virtuous deeds, are most expert to fashion any mischief.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Back to their source the holy rivers turn their tide. Order and the universe are being reversed. 'Tis men whose counsels are treacherous, whose oath by heaven is no longer sure. Rumour shall bring a change o'er my life, bringing it into good repute. Honour's dawn is breaking for woman's sex; no more shall the foul tongue of slander fix upon us.

antistrophe 1

The songs of the poets of old shall cease to make our faithlessness their theme. Phoebus, lord of minstrelsy, hath not implanted in our mind the gift of heavenly song, else had I sung an answering strain to the race of males, for time's long chapter affords many a theme on their sex as well as ours.

strophe 2

With mind distraught didst thou thy father's house desert on thy voyage betwixt ocean's twin rocks, and on a foreign strand thou

dwellest, thy bed left husbandless, poor lady, and thou an exile from the land, dishonoured, persecuted.

antistrophe 2

Gone is the grace that oaths once had. Through all the breadth of Hellas honour is found no more; to heaven hath it sped away. For thee no father's house is open, woe is thee! to be a haven from the troublous storm, while o'er thy home is set another queen, the bride that is preferred to thee.

(*As the* CHORUS *finishes its song,* JASON *enters, alone.* MEDEA *comes out of the house.*)

JASON

It is not now I first remark, but oft ere this, how unruly a pest is a harsh temper. For instance, thou, hadst thou but patiently endured the will of thy superiors, mightest have remained here in this land and house, but now for thy idle words wilt thou be banished. Thy words are naught to me. Cease not to call Jason basest of men; but for those words thou hast spoken against our rulers, count it all gain that exile is thy only punishment. I ever tried to check the outbursts of the angry monarch, and would have had thee stay, but thou wouldst not forego thy silly rage, always reviling our rulers, and so thou wilt be banished. Yet even after all this I weary not of my goodwill, but am come with thus much forethought, lady, that thou mayst not be destitute nor want for aught, when, with thy sons, thou art cast out. Many an evil doth exile bring in its train with it; for even though thou hatest me, never will I harbour hard thoughts of thee.

MEDEA

Thou craven villain (for that is the only name my tongue can find for thee, a foul reproach on thy unmanliness), comest thou to me, thou, most hated foe of gods, of me, and of all mankind? 'Tis no proof of courage or hardihood to confront thy friends after injuring them, but that worst of all human diseases—loss of shame. Yet hast thou done well to come; for I shall ease my soul by reviling thee, and thou wilt be vexed at my recital. I will begin at the very beginning. I saved thy life, as every Hellene knows who sailed with thee aboard the good ship Argo, when thou wert sent to tame and yoke fire-breathing bulls, and to sow the deadly tilth. Yea, and I slew the dragon which guarded the golden fleece, keeping sleepless watch o'er it with many a wreathed coil, and I raised for thee a beacon of deliverance. Father and home of my free will I left and came with thee to Iolcos, 'neath Pelion's hills, for my love was stronger than my prudence. Next I caused the death of Pelias by a doom most grievous, even by his

own children's hand, beguiling them of all their fear. All this have I done for thee, thou traitor! and thou hast cast me over, taking to thyself another wife, though children have been born to us. Hadst thou been childless still, I could have pardoned thy desire for this new union. Gone is now the trust I put in oaths. I cannot even understand whether thou thinkest that the gods of old no longer rule, or that fresh decrees are now in vogue amongst mankind, for thy conscience must tell thee thou hast not kept faith with me. Ah! poor right hand, which thou didst often grasp. These knees thou didst embrace! All in vain, I suffered a traitor to touch me! How short of my hopes I am fallen! But come, I will deal with thee as though thou wert my friend. Yet what kindness can I expect from one so base as thee? But yet I will do it, for my questioning will show thee yet more base. Whither can I turn me now? to my father's house, to my own country, which I for thee deserted to come hither? to the hapless daughters of Pelias? A glad welcome, I trow, would they give me in their home, whose father's death I compassed! My case stands even thus: I am become the bitter foe to those of mine own home, and those whom I need ne'er have wronged I have made mine enemies to pleasure thee. Wherefore to reward me for this thou hast made me doubly blest in the eyes of many a wife in Hellas; and in thee I own a peerless, trusty lord. O woe is me, if indeed I am to be cast forth an exile from the land, without one friend; one lone woman with her babes forlorn! Yea, a fine reproach to thee in thy bridal hour, that thy children and the wife who saved thy life are beggars and vagabonds! O Zeus! why hast thou granted unto man clear signs to know the sham in gold, while on man's brow no brand is stamped whereby to gauge the villain's heart?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There is a something terrible and past all cure, when quarrels arise 'twixt those who are near and dear.

JASON

Needs must I now, it seems, turn orator, and, like a good helmsman on a ship with close-reefed sails, weather that wearisome tongue of thine. Now, I believe, since thou wilt exaggerate thy favours, that to Cypris alone of gods or men I owe the safety of my voyage. Thou hast a subtle wit enough; yet were it a hateful thing for me to say that the Love-god constrained thee by his resistless shaft to save my life. However, I will not reckon this too nicely; 'twas kindly done, however thou didst serve me. Yet for my safety hast thou received more than ever thou gavest, as I will show. First, thou dwellest in Hellas, instead of thy barbarian land, and hast learnt what justice means and how to live by law, not by the dictates of brute force; and all the Hellenes recognize thy cleverness, and thou hast gained a name; whereas, if thou hadst dwelt upon the confines

of the earth, no tongue had mentioned thee. Give me no gold within my halls, nor skill to sing a fairer strain than ever Orpheus sang, unless therewith my fame be spread abroad! So much I say to thee about my own toils, for 'twas thou didst challenge me to this retort. As for the taunts thou urgest against my marriage with the princess, I will prove to thee, first, that I am prudent herein, next chastened in my love, and last a powerful friend to thee and to thy sons; only hold thy peace. Since I have here withdrawn from Iolcos with many a hopeless trouble at my back, what happier device could I, an exile, frame than marriage with the daughter of the king? 'Tis not because I loathe thee for my wife—the thought that rankles in thy heart; 'tis not because I am smitten with desire for a new bride, nor yet that I am eager to vie with others in begetting many children, for those we have are quite enough, and I do not complain. Nay, 'tis that we—and this is most important—may dwell in comfort, instead of suffering want (for well I know that every whilom friend avoids the poor), and that I might rear my sons as doth befit my house; further, that I might be the father of brothers for the children thou hast borne, and raise these to the same high rank, uniting the family in one,—to my lasting bliss. Thou, indeed, hast no need of more children, but me it profits to help my present family by that which is to be. Have I miscarried here? Not even thou wouldest say so unless a rival's charms rankled in thy bosom. No, but you women have such strange ideas, that you think all is well so long as your married life runs smooth; but if some mischance occur to ruffle your love, all that was good and lovely erst you reckon as your foes. Yea, men should have begotten children from some other source, no female race existing; thus would no evil ever have fallen on mankind.

LEADER

This speech, O Jason, hast thou with specious art arranged; but yet I think—albeit in speaking I am indiscreet—that thou hast sinned in thy betrayal of thy wife.

MEDEA

No doubt I differ from the mass of men on many points; for, to my mind, whoso hath skill to fence with words in an unjust cause, incurs the heaviest penalty; for such an one, confident that he can cast a decent veil of words o'er his injustice, dares to practise it; and yet he is not so very clever after all. So do not thou put forth thy specious pleas and clever words to me now, for one word of mine will lay thee low. Hadst thou not had a villain's heart, thou shouldst have gained my consent, then made this match, instead of hiding it from those who loved thee.

JASON

Thou wouldest have lent me ready aid, no doubt, in this proposal, if I had told thee of my marriage, seeing that not even now canst thou restrain thy soul's hot fury.

MEDEA

This was not what restrained thee; but thine eye was turned towards old age, and a foreign wife began to appear a shame to thee.

JASON

Be well assured of this: 'twas not for the woman's sake I wedded the king's daughter, my present wife; but, as I have already told thee, I wished to insure thy safety and to be the father of royal sons bound by blood to my own children—a bulwark to our house.

MEDEA

May that prosperity, whose end is woe, ne'er be mine, nor such wealth as would ever sting my heart!

JASON

Change that prayer as I will teach thee, and thou wilt show more wisdom. Never let happiness appear in sorrow's guise, nor, when thy fortune smiles, pretend she frowns!

MEDEA

Mock on; thou hast a place of refuge; I am alone, an exile soon to be.

JASON

Thy own free choice was this; blame no one else.

MEDEA

What did I do? Marry, then betray thee?

JASON

Against the king thou didst invoke an impious curse.

MEDEA

On thy house too maybe I bring the curse.

JASON

Know this, I will no further dispute this point with thee. But, if thou wilt of my fortune somewhat take for the children or thyself to help thy exile, say on; for I am ready to grant it with ungrudging hand, yea and to send tokens to my friends elsewhere who shall treat thee well. If thou refuse this offer, thou wilt do a foolish deed, but if thou cease from anger the greater will be thy gain.

MEDEA

I will have naught to do with friends of thine, naught will I receive of thee, offer it not to me; a villain's gifts can bring no blessing.

JASON

At least I call the gods to witness, that I am ready in all things to serve thee and thy children, but thou dost scorn my favours and thrustest thy friends stubbornly away; wherefore thy lot will be more bitter still.

MEDEA

Away! By love for thy young bride entrapped, too long thou lingerest outside her chamber; go wed, for, if God will, thou shalt have such a marriage as thou wouldst fain refuse.

(JASON *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

When in excess and past all limits Love doth come, he brings not glory or repute to man; but if the Cyprian queen in moderate might approach, no goddess is so full of charm as she. Never, O never, lady mine, discharge at me from thy golden bow a shaft invincible, in passion's venom dipped.

antistrophe 1

On me may chastity,[1] heaven's fairest gift, look with a favouring eye; never may Cypris, goddess dread, fasten on me a temper to dispute, or restless jealousy, smiting my soul with mad desire for unlawful love, but may she hallow peaceful married life and shrewdly decide whom each of us shall wed.

strophe 2

O my country, O my own dear home! God grant I may never be an outcast from my city, leading that cruel helpless life, whose every day is misery. Ere that may I this life complete and yield to death, ay, death; for there is no misery that doth surpass the loss of fatherland.

antistrophe 2

I have seen with mine eyes, nor from the lips of others have I the lesson learnt; no city, not one friend doth pity thee in this thine awful woe. May he perish and find no favour, whoso hath not in him honour for his friends, freely unlocking his heart to them. Never shall he be friend of mine.

(MEDEA *has been seated in despair on her door-step during the choral song.* AEGEUS *and his attendants enter.*)

AEGEUS

All hail, Medea! no man knoweth fairer prelude to the greeting of friends than this.

MEDEA

All hail to thee likewise, Aegeus, son of wise Pandion. Whence comest thou to this land?

AEGEUS

From Phoebus' ancient oracle.

MEDEA

What took thee on thy travels to the prophetic centre of the earth?

AEGEUS

The wish to ask how I might raise up seed unto myself.

MEDEA

Pray tell me, hast thou till now dragged on a childless life?

AEGEUS

I have no child owing to the visitation of some god.

MEDEA

Hast thou a wife, or hast thou never known the married state?

AEGEUS

I have a wife joined to me in wedlock's bond.

MEDEA

What said Phoebus to thee as to children?

AEGEUS

Words too subtle for man to comprehend.

MEDEA

Surely I may learn the god's answer?

AEGEUS

Most assuredly, for it is just thy subtle wit it needs.

MEDEA

What said the god? speak, if I may hear it.

AEGEUS

He bade me "not loose the wineskin's pendent neck."

MEDEA

Till when? what must thou do first, what country visit?

AEGEUS

Till I to my native home return.

MEDEA

What object hast thou in sailing to this land?

AEGEUS

O'er Troezen's realm is Pittheus king.

MEDEA

Pelops' son, a man devout they say.

AEGEUS

To him I fain would impart the oracle of the god.

MEDEA

The man is shrewd and versed in such-like lore.

AEGEUS

Aye, and to me the dearest of all my warrior friends.

MEDEA

Good luck to thee! success to all thy wishes!

AEGEUS

But why that downcast eye, that wasted cheek?

MEDEA

O Aegeus, my husband has proved most evil.

AEGEUS

What meanest thou? explain to me clearly the cause of thy despondency.

MEDEA

Jason is wronging me though I have given him no cause.

AEGEUS

What hath he done? tell me more clearly.

MEDEA

He is taking another wife to succeed me as mistress of his house.

AEGEUS

Can he have brought himself to such a dastard deed?

MEDEA

Be assured thereof; I, whom he loved of yore, am in dishonour now.

AEGEUS

Hath he found a new love? or does he loathe thy bed?

MEDEA

Much in love is he! A traitor to his friend is he become.

AEGEUS

Enough! if he is a villain as thou sayest.

MEDEA

The alliance he is so much enamoured of is with a princess.

AEGEUS

Who gives his daughter to him? go on, I pray.

MEDEA

Creon, who is lord of this land of Corinth.

AEGEUS

Lady, I can well pardon thy grief.

MEDEA

I am undone, and more than that, am banished from the land.

AEGEUS

By whom? fresh woe this word of thine unfolds.

MEDEA

Creon drives me forth in exile from Corinth.

AEGEUS

Doth Jason allow it? This too I blame him for.

MEDEA

Not in words, but he will not stand out against it. O, I implore thee by this beard and by thy knees, in suppliant posture, pity, O pity my sorrows; do not see me cast forth forlorn, but receive me in thy country, to a seat within thy halls. So may thy wish by heaven's grace be crowned with a full harvest of offspring, and may thy life close in happiness! Thou knowest not the rare good luck thou findest here, for I will make thy childlessness to cease and cause thee to beget fair issue; so potent are the spells I know.

AEGEUS

Lady, on many grounds I am most fain to grant thee this thy boon, first for the gods' sake, next for the children whom thou dost promise I shall beget; for in respect of this I am completely lost. 'Tis thus with me; if

e'er thou reach my land, I will attempt to champion thee as I am bound to do. Only one warning I do give thee first, lady: I will not from this land bear thee away, yet if of thyself thou reach my halls, there shalt thou bide in safety and I will never yield thee up to any man. But from this land escape without my aid, for I have no wish to incur the blame of my allies as well.

MEDEA

It shall be even so; but wouldst thou pledge thy word to this, I should in all be well content with thee.

AEGEUS

Surely thou dost trust me? or is there aught that troubles thee?

MEDEA

Thee I trust; but Pelias' house and Creon are my foes. Wherefore, if thou art bound by an oath, thou wilt not give me up to them when they come to drag me from the land, but, having entered into a compact and sworn by heaven as well, thou wilt become my friend and disregard their overtures. Weak is any aid of mine, whilst they have wealth and a princely house.

AEGEUS

Lady, thy words show much foresight, so if this is thy will, I do not refuse. For I shall feel secure and safe if I have some pretext to offer to thy foes, and thy case too the firmer stands. Now name thy gods.

MEDEA

Swear by the plain of Earth, by Helios my father's sire, and, in one comprehensive oath, by all the race of gods.

AEGEUS

What shall I swear to do, from what refrain? tell me that.

MEDEA

Swear that thou wilt never of thyself expel me from thy land, nor, whilst life is thine, permit any other, one of my foes maybe, to hale me thence if so he will.

AEGEUS

By Earth I swear, by the Sun-god's holy beam and by all the host of heaven that I will stand fast to the terms I hear thee make.

MEDEA

'Tis enough. If thou shouldst break this oath, what curse dost thou invoke upon thyself?

AEGEUS

Whate'er betides the impious.

MEDEA

Go in peace; all is well, and I with what speed I may, will to thy city come, when I have wrought my purpose and obtained my wish.

(AEGEUS *and his retinue depart.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

May Maia's princely son go with thee on thy way to bring thee to thy home, and mayest thou attain that on which thy soul is set so firmly, for to my mind thou seemest a generous man, O Aegeus.

MEDEA

O Zeus, and Justice, child of Zeus, and Sun-god's light, now will I triumph o'er my foes, kind friends; on victory's road have I set forth; good hope have I of wreaking vengeance on those I hate. For where we were in most distress this stranger hath appeared, to be a haven in my counsels; to him will we make fast the cables of our ship when we come to the town and citadel of Pallas. But now will I explain to thee my plans in full; do not expect to hear a pleasant tale. A servant of mine will I to Jason send and crave an interview; then when he comes I will address him with soft words, say, "this pleases me," and, "that is well," even the marriage with the princess, which my treacherous lord is celebrating, and add "it suits us both, 'twas well thought out"; then will I entreat that here my children may abide, not that I mean to leave them in a hostile land for foes to flout, but that I may slay the king's daughter by guile. For I will send them with gifts in their hands, carrying them unto the bride to save them from banishment, a robe of finest woof and a chaplet of gold. And if these ornaments she take and put them on, miserably shall she die, and likewise everyone who touches her; with such fell poisons will I smear my gifts. And here I quit this theme; but I shudder at the deed I must do next; for I will slay the children I have borne; there is none shall take them from my toils; and when I have utterly confounded Jason's house I will leave the land, escaping punishment for my dear children's murder, after my most unholy deed. For I cannot endure the taunts of enemies, kind friends; enough! what gain is life to me? I have no country, home, or refuge left. O, I did wrong, that hour I left my father's home, persuaded by that Hellene's words, who now shall pay the penalty, so help me God. Never shall he see again alive the children I bore to him, nor from his new bride shall he beget issue, for she must die a hideous death, slain by my drugs. Let no one deem me a poor weak woman who sits with folded hands, but of another mould, dangerous to foes and well-disposed to friends; for they win the fairest fame who live their life like me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Since thou hast imparted this design to me, I bid thee hold thy hand, both from a wish to serve thee and because I would uphold the laws men make.

MEDEA

It cannot but be so; thy words I pardon since thou art not in the same sorry plight that I am.

LEADER

O lady, wilt thou steel thyself to slay thy children twain?

MEDEA

I will, for that will stab my husband to the heart.

LEADER

It may, but thou wilt be the saddest wife alive.

MEDEA

No matter; wasted is every word that comes 'twixt now and then. Ho! (*The* NURSE *enters in answer to her call.*) Thou, go call me Jason hither, for thee I do employ on every mission of trust. No word divulge of all my purpose, as thou art to thy mistress loyal and likewise of my sex. (*The* NURSE *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)[2]

strophe 1

Sons of Erechtheus, heroes happy from of yore, children of the blessed gods, fed on wisdom's glorious food in a holy land ne'er pillaged by its foes, ye who move with sprightly step through a climate ever bright and clear, where, as legend tells, the Muses nine, Pieria's holy maids, were brought to birth by Harmonia with the golden hair.

antistrophe 1

And poets sing how Cypris drawing water from the streams of fair-flowing Cephissus breathes o'er the land a gentle breeze of balmy winds, and ever as she crowns her tresses with a garland of sweet rose-buds sends forth the Loves to sit by wisdom's side, to take a part in every excellence.

strophe 2

How then shall the city of sacred streams, the land that welcomes those it loves, receive thee, the murderess of thy children, thee whose presence with others is a pollution? Think on the murder of thy children, consider the bloody deed thou takest on thee. Nay, by thy knees we, one and all, implore thee, slay not thy babes.

antistrophe 2

Where shall hand or heart find hardihood enough in wreaking such a fearsome deed upon thy sons? How wilt thou look upon thy babes, and still without a tear retain thy bloody purpose? Thou canst not, when they fall at thy feet for mercy, steel thy heart and dip in their blood thy hand.

(JASON *enters.*)

JASON

I am come at thy bidding, for e'en though thy hate for me is bitter thou shalt not fail in this small boon, but I will hear what new request thou hast to make of me, lady.

MEDEA

Jason, I crave thy pardon for the words I spoke, and well thou mayest brook my burst of passion, for ere now we twain have shared much love. For I have reasoned with my soul and railed upon me thus, "Ah! poor heart! why am I thus distraught, why so angered 'gainst all good advice, why have I come to hate the rulers of the land, my husband too, who does the best for me he can, in wedding with a princess and rearing for my children noble brothers? Shall I not cease to fret? What possesses me, when heaven its best doth offer? Have I not my children to consider? do I forget that we are fugitives, in need of friends?" When I had thought all this I saw how foolish I had been, how senselessly enraged. So now I do commend thee and think thee most wise in forming this connection for us; but I was mad, I who should have shared in these designs, helped on thy plans, and lent my aid to bring about the match, only too pleased to wait upon thy bride. But what we are, we are, we women, evil I will not say; wherefore thou shouldst not sink to our sorry level nor with our weapons meet our childishness.

I yield and do confess that I was wrong then, but now have I come to a better mind. Come hither, my children, come, leave the house, step forth, and with me greet and bid farewell to your father, be reconciled from all past bitterness unto your friends, as now your mother is; for we have made a truce and anger is no more.

(*The* ATTENDANT *comes out of the house with the children.*)

Take his right hand; ah me! my sad fate! when I reflect, as now, upon the hidden future. O my children, since there awaits you even thus a long, long life, stretch forth the hand to take a fond farewell. Ah me! how new to tears am I, how full of fear! For now that I have at last released me from my quarrel with your father, I let the tear-drops stream adown my tender cheek.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

From my eyes too bursts forth the copious tear; O, may no greater ill than the present e'er befall!

JASON

Lady, I praise this conduct, not that I blame what is past; for it is but natural to the female sex to vent their spleen against a husband when he trafficks in other marriages besides his own. But thy heart is changed to wiser schemes and thou art determined on the better course, late though it be; this is acting like a woman of sober sense. And for you, my sons, hath your father provided with all good heed a sure refuge, by God's grace; for ye, I trow, shall with your brothers share hereafter the foremost rank in this Corinthian realm. Only grow up, for all the rest your sire and whoso of the gods is kind to us is bringing to pass. May I see you reach man's full estate, high o'er the heads of those I hate! But thou, lady, why with fresh tears dost thou thine eyelids wet, turning away thy wan cheek, with no welcome for these my happy tidings?

MEDEA

'Tis naught; upon these children my thoughts were turned.

JASON

Then take heart; for I will see that it is well with them.

MEDEA

I will do so; nor will I doubt thy word; woman is a weak creature, ever given to tears.

JASON

Why prithee, unhappy one, dost moan o'er these children?

MEDEA

I gave them birth; and when thou didst pray long life for them, pity entered into my soul to think that these things must be. But the reason of thy coming hither to speak with me is partly told, the rest will I now mention. Since it is the pleasure of the rulers of the land to banish me, and well I know 'twere best for me to stand not in the way of thee or of the rulers by dwelling here, enemy as I am thought unto their house, forth from this land in exile am I going, but these children,—that they may know thy fostering hand, beg Creon to remit their banishment.

JASON

I doubt whether I can persuade him, yet must I attempt it.

MEDEA

At least do thou bid thy wife ask her sire this boon, to remit the exile of the children from this land.

JASON

Yea, that will I; and her methinks I shall persuade, since she is a woman like the rest.

MEDEA

I too will aid thee in this task, for by the children's hand I will send to her gifts that far surpass in beauty, I well know, aught that now is seen 'mongst men, a robe of finest tissue and a chaplet of chased gold. But one of my attendants must haste and bring the ornaments hither. (*A servant goes into the house.*) Happy shall she be not once alone but ten thousandfold, for in thee she wins the noblest soul to share her love, and gets these gifts as well which on a day my father's sire, the Sun-god, bestowed on his descendants. (*The servant returns and hands the gifts to the children.*) My children, take in your hands these wedding gifts, and bear them as an offering to the royal maid, the happy bride; for verily the gifts she shall receive are not to be scorned.

JASON

But why so rashly rob thyself of these gifts? Dost think a royal palace wants for robes or gold? Keep them, nor give them to another. For well I know that if my lady hold me in esteem, she will set my price above all wealth.

MEDEA

Say not so; 'tis said that gifts tempt even gods; and o'er men's minds gold holds more potent sway than countless words. Fortune smiles upon thy bride, and heaven now doth swell her triumph; youth is hers and princely power; yet to save my children from exile I would barter life, not dross alone. Children, when we are come to the rich palace, pray your father's new bride, my mistress, with suppliant voice to save you from exile, offering her these ornaments the while; for it is most needful that she receive the gifts in her own hand. Now go and linger not; may ye succeed and to your mother bring back the glad tidings she fain would hear!

(JASON, *the* ATTENDANT, *and the children go out together.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Gone, gone is every hope I had that the children yet might live; forth to their doom they now proceed. The hapless bride will take, ay, take the golden crown that is to be her ruin; with her own hand will she lift and place upon her golden locks the garniture of death.

antistrophe 1

Its grace and sheen divine will tempt her to put on the robe and crown of gold, and in that act will she deck herself to be a bride amid the dead. Such is the snare whereinto she will fall, such is the deadly doom that waits the hapless maid, nor shall she from the curse escape.

strophe 2

And thou, poor wretch, who to thy sorrow art wedding a king's daughter, little thinkest of the doom thou art bringing on thy children's life, or of the cruel death that waits thy bride. Woe is thee! how art thou fallen from thy high estate!

antistrophe 2

Next do I bewail thy sorrows, O mother hapless in thy children, thou who wilt slay thy babes because thou hast a rival, the babes thy husband hath deserted impiously to join him to another bride.

(*The* ATTENDANT *enters with the children.*)

ATTENDANT

Thy children, lady, are from exile freed, and gladly did the royal bride accept thy gifts in her own hands, and so thy children made their peace with her.

MEDEA

Ah!

ATTENDANT

Why art so disquieted in thy prosperous hour? Why turnest thou thy cheek away, and hast no welcome for my glad news?

MEDEA

Ah me!

ATTENDANT

These groans but ill accord with the news I bring.

MEDEA

Ah me! once more I say.

ATTENDANT

Have I unwittingly announced some evil tidings? Have I erred in thinking my news was good?

MEDEA

Thy news is as it is; I blame thee not.

ATTENDANT

Then why this downcast eye, these floods of tears?

MEDEA

Old friend, needs must I weep; for the gods and I with fell intent devised these schemes.

ATTENDANT

Be of good cheer; thou too of a surety shalt by thy sons yet be brought home again.

MEDEA

Ere that shall I bring others to their home, ah! woe is me!

ATTENDANT

Thou art not the only mother from thy children reft. Bear patiently thy troubles as a mortal must.

MEDEA

I will obey; go thou within the house and make the day's provision for the children. (*The* ATTENDANT *enters the house.* MEDEA *turns to the children.*) O my babes, my babes, ye have still a city and a home, where far from me and my sad lot you will live your lives, reft of your mother for ever; while I must to another land in banishment, or ever I have had my joy of you, or lived to see you happy, or ever I have graced your marriage couch, your bride, your bridal bower, or lifted high the wedding torch. Ah me! a victim of my own self-will. So it was all in vain I reared you, O my sons; in vain did suffer, racked with anguish, enduring the cruel pangs of childbirth. 'Fore Heaven I once had hope, poor me! high hope of ye that you would nurse me in my age and deck my corpse with loving hands, a boon we mortals covet; but now is my sweet fancy dead and gone; for I must lose you both and in bitterness and sorrow drag through life. And ye shall never with fond eyes see your mother more, for o'er your life there comes a change. Ah me! ah me! why do ye look at me so, my children? why smile that last sweet smile? Ah me! what am I to do? My heart gives way when I behold my children's laughing eyes. O, I cannot; farewell to all my former schemes; I will take the children from the land, the babes I bore. Why should I wound their sire by wounding them, and get me a twofold measure of sorrow? No, no, I will not do it. Farewell my scheming! And yet what possesses me? Can I consent to let those foes of mine escape from punishment, and incur their mockery? I must face this deed. Out upon my craven heart! to think that I should even have let the soft words escape my soul. Into the house, children! (*The children go into the house.*) And whoso feels he must not be present at my sacrifice, must see to it himself; I will not spoil my handiwork. Ah!

ah! do not, my heart, O do not do this deed! Let the children go, unhappy one, spare the babes! For if they live, they will cheer thee in our exile there. Nay, by the fiends of hell's abyss, never, never will I hand my children over to their foes to mock and flout. Die they must in any case, and since 'tis so, why I, the mother who bore them, will give the fatal blow. In any case their doom is fixed and there is no escape. Already the crown is on her head, the robe is round her, and she is dying, the royal bride; that do I know full well. But now since I have a piteous path to tread, and yet more piteous still the path I send my children on, fain would I say farewell to them. (*The children come out at her call. She takes them in her arms.*) O my babes, my babes, let your mother kiss your hands. Ah! hands I love so well, O lips most dear to me! O noble form and features of my children, I wish ye joy, but in that other land, for here your father robs you of your home. O the sweet embrace, the soft young cheek, the fragrant breath! my children! Go, leave me; I cannot bear to longer look upon ye; my sorrow wins the day. At last I understand the awful deed I am to do; but passion, that cause of direst woes to mortal man, hath triumphed o'er my sober thoughts.

(*She goes into the house with the children.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Oft ere now have I pursued subtler themes and have faced graver issues than woman's sex should seek to probe; but then e'en we aspire to culture, which dwells with us to teach us wisdom; I say not all; for small is the class amongst women—(one maybe shalt thou find 'mid many)—that is not incapable of wisdom. And amongst mortals I do assert that they who are wholly without experience and have never had children far surpass in happiness those who are parents. The childless, because they have never proved whether children grow up to be a blessing or curse to men are removed from all share in many troubles; whilst those who have a sweet race of children growing up in their houses do wear away, as I perceive, their whole life through; first with the thought how they may train them up in virtue, next how they shall leave their sons the means to live; and after all this 'tis far from clear whether on good or bad children they bestow their toil. But one last crowning woe for every mortal man I now will name; suppose that they have found sufficient means to live, and seen their children grow to man's estate and walk in virtue's path, still if fortune so befall, comes Death and bears the children's bodies off to Hades. Can it be any profit to the gods to heap upon us mortal men beside our other woes this further grief for children lost, a grief surpassing all?

(MEDEA *comes out of the house.*)

MEDEA

Kind friends, long have I waited expectantly to know how things would at the palace chance. And lo! I see one of Jason's servants coming hither, whose hurried gasps for breath proclaim him the bearer of some fresh tidings.

(*A* MESSENGER *rushes in.*)

MESSENGER

Fly, fly, Medea! who hast wrought an awful deed, transgressing every law; nor leave behind or sea-borne bark or car that scours the plain.

MEDEA

Why, what hath chanced that calls for such a flight of mine?

MESSENGER

The princess is dead, a moment gone, and Creon too, her sire, slain by those drugs of thine.

MEDEA

Tidings most fair are thine! Henceforth shalt thou be ranked amongst my friends and benefactors.

MESSENGER

Ha! What? Art sane? Art not distraught, lady, who hearest with joy the outrage to our royal house done, and art not at the horrid tale afraid?

MEDEA

Somewhat have I, too, to say in answer to thy words. Be not so hasty, friend, but tell the manner of their death, for thou wouldst give me double joy, if so they perished miserably.

MESSENGER

When the children twain whom thou didst bear came with their father and entered the palace of the bride, right glad were we thralls who had shared thy griefs, for instantly from ear to ear a rumour spread that thou and thy lord had made up your former quarrel. One kissed thy children's hands, another their golden hair, while I for very joy went with them in person to the women's chambers. Our mistress, whom now we do revere in thy room, cast a longing glance at Jason, ere she saw thy children twain; but then she veiled her eyes and turned her blanching cheek away, disgusted at their coming; but thy husband tried to check his young bride's angry humour with these words: "O, be not angered 'gainst thy friends; cease from wrath and turn once more thy face this way, counting as friends whomso thy husband counts, and accept these gifts, and for my sake crave thy sire to remit these children's exile." Soon as she saw the

ornaments, no longer she held out, but yielded to her lord in all; and ere the father and his sons were far from the palace gone, she took the broidered robe and put it on, and set the golden crown about her tresses, arranging her hair at her bright mirror, with many a happy smile at her breathless counterfeit. Then rising from her seat she passed across the chamber, tripping lightly on her fair white foot, exulting in the gift, with many a glance at her uplifted ankle. When lo! a scene of awful horror did ensue. In a moment she turned pale, reeled backwards, trembling in every limb, and sinks upon a seat scarce soon enough to save herself from falling to the ground. An aged dame, one of her company, thinking belike it was a fit from Pan or some god sent, raised a cry of prayer, till from her mouth she saw the foam-flakes issue, her eyeballs rolling in their sockets, and all the blood her face desert; then did she raise a loud scream far different from her former cry. Forthwith one handmaid rushed to her father's house, another to her new bridegroom to tell his bride's sad fate, and the whole house echoed with their running to and fro. By this time would a quick walker have made the turn in a course of six plethra [3] and reached the goal, when she with one awful shriek awoke, poor sufferer, from her speechless trance and oped her closed eyes, for against her a twofold anguish was warring. The chaplet of gold about her head was sending forth a wondrous stream of ravening flame, while the fine raiment, thy children's gift, was preying on the hapless maiden's fair white flesh; and she starts from her seat in a blaze and seeks to fly, shaking her hair and head this way and that, to cast the crown therefrom; but the gold held firm to its fastenings, and the flame, as she shook her locks, blazed forth the more with double fury. Then to the earth she sinks, by the cruel blow o'ercome; past all recognition now save to a father's eye; for her eyes had lost their tranquil gaze, her face no more its natural look preserved, and from the crown of her head blood and fire in mingled stream ran down; and from her bones the flesh kept peeling off beneath the gnawing of those secret drugs, e'en as when the pine-tree weeps its tears of pitch, a fearsome sight to see. And all were afraid to touch the corpse, for we were warned by what had chanced. Anon came her hapless father unto the house, all unwitting of her doom, and stumbles o'er the dead, and loud he cried, and folding his arms about her kissed her, with words like these the while, "O my poor, poor child, which of the gods hath destroyed thee thus foully? Who is robbing me of thee, old as I am and ripe for death? O my child, alas! would I could die with thee!" He ceased his sad lament, and would have raised his aged frame, but found himself held fast by the fine-spun robe as ivy that clings to the branches of the bay, and then ensued a fearful struggle. He strove to rise, but she still held him back; and if ever he pulled with all his might, from off his bones his aged flesh he tore. At last he gave it up, and breathed forth his soul in

awful suffering; for he could no longer master the pain. So there they lie, daughter and aged sire, dead side by side, a grievous sight that calls for tears. And as for thee, I leave thee out of my consideration, for thyself must discover a means to escape punishment. Not now for the first time I think this human life a shadow; yea, and without shrinking I will say that they amongst men who pretend to wisdom and expend deep thought on words do incur a serious charge of folly; for amongst mortals no man is happy; wealth may pour in and make one luckier than another, but none can happy be.

(*The* MESSENGER *departs.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This day the deity, it seems, will mass on Jason, as he well deserves, a heavy load of evils. Woe is thee, daughter of Creon! We pity thy sad fate, gone as thou art to Hades' halls as the price of thy marriage with Jason.

MEDEA

My friends, I am resolved upon the deed; at once will I slay my children and then leave this land, without delaying long enough to hand them over to some more savage hand to butcher. Needs must they die in any case; and since they must, I will slay them—I, the mother that bare them. O heart of mine, steel thyself! Why do I hesitate to do the awful deed that must be done? Come, take the sword, thou wretched hand of mine! Take it, and advance to the post whence starts thy life of sorrow! Away with cowardice! Give not one thought to thy babes, how dear they are or how thou art their mother. This one brief day forget thy children dear, and after that lament; for though thou wilt slay them yet they were thy darlings still, and I am a lady of sorrows.

(MEDEA *enters the house.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O earth, O sun whose beam illumines all, look, look upon this lost woman, ere she stretch forth her murderous hand upon her sons for blood; for lo! these are scions of thy own golden seed, and the blood of gods is in danger of being shed by man. O light, from Zeus proceeding, stay her, hold her hand, forth from the house chase this fell bloody fiend by demons led. Vainly wasted were the throes thy children cost thee; vainly hast thou borne, it seems, sweet babes, O thou who hast left behind thee that passage through the blue Symplegades, that strangers justly hate. Ah! hapless one, why doth fierce anger thy soul assail? Why in its place is fell murder growing up? For grievous unto mortal men are pollutions that come of kindred blood poured on the earth, woes to suit each crime hurled from heaven on the murderer's house.

FIRST SON (*within*)

Ah, me; what can I do? Whither fly to escape my mother's blows?

SECOND SON (*within*)

I know not, sweet brother mine; we are lost.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Didst hear, didst hear the children's cry? O lady, born to sorrow, victim of an evil fate! Shall I enter the house? For the children's sake I am resolved to ward off the murder.

FIRST SON (*within*)

Yea, by heaven I adjure you; help, your aid is needed.

SECOND SON (*within*)

Even now the toils of the sword are closing round us.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O hapless mother, surely thou hast a heart of stone or steel to slay the offspring of thy womb by such a murderous doom. Of all the wives of yore I know but one who laid her hand upon her children dear, even Ino, whom the gods did madden in the day that the wife of Zeus drove her wandering from her home. But she, poor sufferer, flung herself into the sea because of the foul murder of her children, leaping o'er the wave-beat cliff, and in her death was she united to her children twain. Can there be any deed of horror left to follow this? Woe for the wooing of women fraught with disaster! What sorrows hast thou caused for men ere now!

(JASON *and his attendants enter.*)

JASON

Ladies, stationed near this house, pray tell me is the author of these hideous deeds, Medea, still within, or hath she fled from hence? For she must hide beneath the earth or soar on wings towards heaven's vault, if she would avoid the vengeance of the royal house. Is she so sure she will escape herself unpunished from this house, when she hath slain the rulers of the land? But enough of this! I am forgetting her children. As for her, those whom she hath wronged will do the like by her; but I am come to save the children's life, lest the victim's kin visit their wrath on me, in vengeance for the murder foul, wrought by my children's mother.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Unhappy man, thou knowest not the full extent of thy misery, else had thou never said those words.

JASON

How now? Can she want to kill me too?

LEADER

Thy sons are dead; slain by their own mother's hand.

JASON

O God! what sayest thou? Woman, thou hast sealed my doom.

LEADER

Thy children are no more; be sure of this.

JASON

Where slew she them; within the palace or outside?

LEADER

Throw wide the doors and see thy children's murdered corpses.

JASON

Haste, ye slaves, loose the bolts, undo the fastenings, that I may see the sight of twofold woe, my murdered sons and her, whose blood in vengeance I will shed.

(MEDEA *appears above the house, on a chariot drawn by dragons; the children's corpses are beside her.*)

MEDEA

Why shake those doors and attempt to loose their bolts, in quest of the dead and me their murderess? From such toil desist. If thou wouldst aught with me, say on, if so thou wilt; but never shalt thou lay hand on me, so swift the steeds the sun, my father's sire, to me doth give to save me from the hand of my foes.

JASON

Accursed woman! by gods, by me and all mankind abhorred as never woman was, who hadst the heart to stab thy babes, thou their mother, leaving me undone and childless; this hast thou done and still dost gaze upon the sun and earth after this deed most impious. Curses on thee! I now perceive what then I missed in the day I brought thee, fraught with doom, from thy home in a barbarian land to dwell in Hellas, traitress to thy sire and to the land that nurtured thee. On me the gods have hurled the curse that dogged thy steps, for thou didst slay thy brother at his hearth ere thou cam'st aboard our fair ship, Argo. Such was the outset of thy life of crime; then didst thou wed with me, and having borne me sons to glut thy passion's lust, thou now hast slain them. Not one amongst the wives of Hellas e'er had dared this deed; yet before them all I chose

thee for my wife, wedding a foe to be my doom, no woman, but a lioness fiercer than Tyrrhene Scylla in nature. But with reproaches heaped a thousandfold I cannot wound thee, so brazen is thy nature. Perish, vile sorceress, murderess of thy babes! Whilst I must mourn my luckless fate, for I shall ne'er enjoy my new-found bride, nor shall I have the children, whom I bred and reared, alive to say the last farewell to me; nay, I have lost them.

MEDEA

To this thy speech I could have made a long reply, but Father Zeus knows well all I have done for thee, and the treatment thou hast given me. Yet thou wert not ordained to scorn my love and lead a life of joy in mockery of me, nor was thy royal bride nor Creon, who gave thee a second wife, to thrust me from this land and rue it not. Wherefore, if thou wilt, call me e'en a lioness, and Scylla, whose home is in the Tyrrhene land; for I in turn have wrung thy heart, as well I might.

JASON

Thou, too, art grieved thyself, and sharest in my sorrow.

MEDEA

Be well assured I am; but it relieves my pain to know thou canst not mock at me.

JASON

O my children, how vile a mother ye have found!

MEDEA

My sons, your father's feeble lust has been your ruin!

JASON

'Twas not my hand, at any rate, that slew them.

MEDEA

No, but thy foul treatment of me, and thy new marriage.

JASON

Didst think that marriage cause enough to murder them?

MEDEA

Dost think a woman counts this a trifling injury?

JASON

So she be self-restrained; but in thy eyes all is evil.

MEDEA

Thy sons are dead and gone. That will stab thy heart.

JASON

They live, methinks, to bring a curse upon thy head.

MEDEA

The gods know, whoso of them began this troublous coil.

JASON

Indeed, they know that hateful heart of thine.

MEDEA

Thou art as hateful. I am aweary of thy bitter tongue.

JASON

And I likewise of thine. But parting is easy.

MEDEA

Say how; what am I to do? for I am fain as thou to go.

JASON

Give up to me those dead, to bury and lament.

MEDEA

No, never! I will bury them myself, bearing them to Hera's sacred field,[4] who watches o'er the Cape, that none of their foes may insult them by pulling down their tombs; and in this land of Sisyphus I will ordain hereafter a solemn feast and mystic rites to atone for this impious murder. Myself will now to the land of Erechtheus, to dwell with Aegeus, Pandion's son. But thou, as well thou mayst, shalt die a caitiff's death,[5] thy head crushed 'neath a shattered relic of Argo, when thou hast seen the bitter ending of my marriage.

JASON

The curse of our sons' avenging spirit and of Justice, that calls for blood, be on thee!

MEDEA

What god or power divine hears thee, breaker of oaths and every law of hospitality?

JASON

Fie upon thee! cursed witch! child-murderess!

MEDEA

To thy house! go, bury thy wife.

JASON

I go, bereft of both my sons.

MEDEA

Thy grief is yet to come; wait till old age is with thee too.

JASON

O my dear, dear children!

MEDEA

Dear to their mother, not to thee.

JASON

And yet thou didst slay them?

MEDEA

Yea, to vex thy heart.

JASON

One last fond kiss, ah me! I fain would on their lips imprint.

MEDEA

Embraces now, and fond farewells for them; but then a cold repulse!

JASON

By heaven I do adjure thee, let me touch their tender skin.

MEDEA

No, no! in vain this word has sped its flight.

JASON

O Zeus, dost hear how I am driven hence; dost mark the treatment I receive from this she-lion, fell murderess of her young? Yet so far as I may and can, I raise for them a dirge, and do adjure the gods to witness how thou hast slain my sons, and wilt not suffer me to embrace or bury their dead bodies. Would I had never begotten them to see thee slay them after all!

(*The chariot carries* MEDEA *away.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Many a fate doth Zeus dispense, high on his Olympian throne; oft do the gods bring things to pass beyond man's expectation; that, which we thought would be, is not fulfilled, while for the unlooked-for, god finds out a way; and such hath been the issue of this matter.[6]

COLERIDGE's translation has been slightly altered in the following lines: 37, 184, 229, 232, 236, 577, 578, 592, 690, 1049, 1089, 1272, 1351.

1. Coleridge renders thus the Greek noun, *sophrosyna,* which is difficult if not impossible to translate into English by a single word. Its core of meaning includes the notions of self-restraint, self-control, temperance, and moderation.

2. This choral ode in praise of Athens is one of the most famous in Euripides. The *Medea* itself is noteworthy for the high quality of its poetry.

3. A *plethron* was approximately 100 feet.

4. This probably refers to a temple of Hera on the Acrocorinthus. Medea's words would therefore be in general agreement with the cult tradition that the children were buried in Corinth.

5. Coleridge's note here reads, "Legend told how Jason was slain by a beam falling on him as he lay asleep under the shadow of his ship Argo."

6. These lines, here with a slight addition, are likewise found at the conclusion of the *Alcestis, Helen, The Bacchae,* and the *Andromache.*

III
HIPPOLYTUS

Characters in the Play

Aphrodite
Hippolytus, *bastard son of* Theseus
Attendants of Hippolytus
Chorus of Troezenian Women
Nurse of Phaedra
Phaedra, *wife of* Theseus
Theseus
Messenger
Artemis

INTRODUCTION

EURIPIDES produced the *Hippolytus* in the spring of 428 B.C. He had already written one tragedy with this title, not now extant, which the Athenians did not receive with favour. Hence our present piece is evidently a reworking of the first version, and in the form in which we now have it, in the opinion of many, is by far the greatest of Euripides' plays. Its tone in many places is almost Sophoclean, and yet it contains as well lyric passages, marked by an awareness of nature's beauty, which have a distinct romantic ring. The plot is relatively simple and depends but slightly upon events that have transpired prior to the opening of the play. We need know only that Theseus is now living with his new and younger wife, Phaedra, at Troezen. With them dwells a bastard son of Theseus named Hippolytus, whom the queen of the Amazons had borne him in his youth. The drama grows directly from this situation and in the end unfolds the tragedy of these three persons.

Despite its apparent simplicity, the play is most difficult to interpret. Critics tend to reduce the tragedy to a study of the conflict between the two forces symbolized by Artemis and Aphrodite—sexual purity, ascetism over against passionate love. These symbols have their human proponents in Hippolytus and Phaedra. One might be tempted to argue that if each had not been guilty of going to extremes, there would have been no tragic outcome. Such an interpretation, however, seems to lead to an over-simplification, for the characters and the problem, when examined carefully, prove to be far more complicated. Hippolytus is clearly a victim of *hybris*, overweening pride. Pure and chaste though he actually may be, he is pure in his own conceit. Likewise, though Phaedra has struggled courageously to overcome her passion for Hippolytus, at the last she exhibits a fatal weakness. Also Theseus, who does not function symbolically, as in a sense Phaedra and Hippolytus do, and on whom the heaviest burden of the tragedy falls at the end, pays the penalty not only for his incontinence as a youth, but also for his hasty condemnation of his son. The clash of these relatively complex characters renders suspect any simplified interpretation of the play.

One of the most powerful features of the tragedy is the manner in which Euripides rehabilitates the character of Hippolytus just before

he dies. The young man's eyes are at last opened; no longer is he preoccupied with his own purity, but he is able to get outside himself, see the situation from Theseus' point of view, and to realize that his father's fate to live is far worse than his own to die. This awakening of Hippolytus, accomplished partly by his own suffering and partly through Artemis (who appears at the close as a *deus ex machina*) to whose worship he has devoted his life and who comforts him in death, raises the play to a universal level reached only by the greatest tragedy.

The rôle which the gods perform in the drama is most puzzling to explain. As has already been noted, both Artemis and Aphrodite serve partially as symbols, but on the other hand they do not seem to be completely devoid of religious significance. What constitutes the major difficulty is that they seem to be capricious, vindictive, and jealous of each other. Aphrodite announces in the prologue that she is going to punish Hippolytus for neglecting her worship, and Artemis at the end vows she will exact her vengeance from Aphrodite for her favorite's death. Here as always Euripides' theological thought is unclear. On the human level, the poet's grasp of his problem is firm. Phaedra, Hippolytus and Theseus all have the stature of tragic figures. We can only conclude either that Euripides believed it to be a matter of little importance that man strive to understand the nature of the divine power, which is ultimately inscrutable and therefore should be completely accepted as such, or that he was so interested in analyzing man's emotional and psychological states that he never came finally to grips with the problems of religion.

HIPPOLYTUS

(SCENE:—*Before the royal palace at Troezen. There is a statue of* APHRODITE *on one side; on the other, a statue of* ARTEMIS. *There is an altar before each image. The goddess* APHRODITE *appears alone.*)

APHRODITE

WIDE o'er man my realm extends, and proud the name that I, the goddess Cypris, bear, both in heaven's courts and 'mongst all those who dwell within the limits of the sea and the bounds of Atlas, beholding the sun-god's light; those that respect my power I advance to honour, but bring to ruin all who vaunt themselves at me. For even in the race of gods this feeling finds a home, even pleasure at the honour men pay them. And the truth of this I soon will show; for that son of Theseus, born of the Amazon, Hippolytus, whom holy Pittheus taught, alone of all the dwellers in this land of Troezen, calls me vilest of the deities. Love he scorns, and, as for marriage, will none of it; but Artemis, daughter of Zeus, sister of Phoebus, he doth honour, counting her the chief of goddesses, and ever through the greenwood, attendant on his virgin goddess, he clears the earth of wild beasts with his fleet hounds, enjoying the comradeship of one too high for mortal ken. 'Tis not this I grudge him, no! why should I? But for his sins against me, I will this very day take vengeance on Hippolytus; for long ago I cleared the ground of many obstacles, so it needs but trifling toil. For as he came one day from the home of Pittheus to witness the solemn mystic rites and be initiated therein in Pandion's land, Phaedra, his father's noble wife, caught sight of him, and by my designs she found her heart was seized with wild desire. And ere she came to this Troezenian realm, a temple did she rear to Cypris hard by the rock of Pallas where it o'erlooks this country, for love of the youth in another land; and to win his love in days to come she called after his name the temple she had founded for the goddess. Now, when Theseus left the land of Cecrops, flying the pollution of the blood of Pallas' sons, and with his wife sailed to this shore, content to suffer exile for a year, then began the wretched wife to pine away in silence, moaning 'neath love's cruel scourge, and none of her servants knows what disease afflicts her. But this passion of hers must

not fail thus. No, I will discover the matter to Theseus, and all shall be laid bare. Then will the father slay his child, my bitter foe, by curses, for the lord Poseidon granted this boon to Theseus; three wishes of the god to ask, nor ever ask in vain. So Phaedra is to die, an honoured death 'tis true, but still to die; for I will not let her suffering outweigh the payment of such forfeit by my foes as shall satisfy my honour. But lo! I see the son of Theseus coming hither—Hippolytus, fresh from the labours of the chase. I will get me hence. At his back follows a long train of retainers, in joyous cries of revelry uniting and hymns of praise to Artemis, his goddess; for little he recks that Death hath oped his gates for him, and that this is his last look upon the light.

(APHRODITE *vanishes.* HIPPOLYTUS *and his retinue of hunting* ATTENDANTS *enter, singing. They move to worship at the altar of* ARTEMIS.)

HIPPOLYTUS

Come follow, friends, singing to Artemis, daughter of Zeus, throned in the sky, whose votaries we are.

ATTENDANTS

Lady goddess, awful queen, daughter of Zeus, all hail! hail! child of Latona and of Zeus, peerless mid the virgin choir, who hast thy dwelling in heaven's wide mansions at thy noble father's court, in the golden house of Zeus. All hail! most beauteous Artemis, lovelier far than all the daughters of Olympus!

HIPPOLYTUS (*speaking*)

For thee, O mistress mine, I bring this woven wreath, culled from a virgin meadow, where nor shepherd dares to herd his flock nor ever scythe hath mown, but o'er the mead unshorn the bee doth wing its way in spring; and with the dew from rivers drawn purity that garden tends. Such as know no cunning lore, yet in whose nature self-control, made perfect, hath a home, these may pluck the flowers, but not the wicked world. Accept, I pray, dear mistress, mine this chaplet from my holy hand to crown thy locks of gold; for I, and none other of mortals, have this high guerdon, to be with thee, with thee converse, hearing thy voice, though not thy face beholding. So be it mine to end my life as I began.

LEADER OF THE ATTENDANTS

My prince! we needs must call upon the gods, our lords, so wilt thou listen to a friendly word from me?

HIPPOLYTUS

Why, that will I! else were I proved a fool.

LEADER

Dost know, then, the way of the world?

HIPPOLYTUS

Not I; but wherefore such a question?

LEADER

It hates reserve which careth not for all men's love.

HIPPOLYTUS

And rightly too; reserve in man is ever galling.

LEADER

But there's a charm in courtesy?

HIPPOLYTUS

The greatest surely; aye, and profit, too, at trifling cost.

LEADER

Dost think the same law holds in heaven as well?

HIPPOLYTUS

I trow it doth, since all our laws we men from heaven draw.

LEADER

Why, then, dost thou neglect to greet an august goddess?

HIPPOLYTUS

Whom speak'st thou of? Keep watch upon thy tongue lest it some mischief cause.

LEADER

Cypris I mean, whose image is stationed o'er thy gate.

HIPPOLYTUS

I greet her from afar, preserving still my chastity.

LEADER

Yet is she an august goddess, far renowned on earth.

HIPPOLYTUS

'Mongst gods as well as men we have our several preferences.

LEADER

I wish thee luck, and wisdom too, so far as thou dost need it.

HIPPOLYTUS

No god, whose worship craves the night, hath charms for me.

LEADER

My son, we should avail us of the gifts that gods confer.

HIPPOLYTUS

Go in, my faithful followers, and make ready food within the house; a well-filled board hath charms after the chase is o'er. Rub down my steeds ye must, that when I have had my fill I may yoke them to the chariot and give them proper exercise. As for thy Queen of Love, a long farewell to her.

(HIPPOLYTUS *goes into the palace, followed by all the* ATTENDANTS *except the* LEADER, *who prays before the statue of* APHRODITE.)

LEADER

Meantime I with sober mind, for I must not copy my young master, do offer up my prayer to thy image, lady Cypris, in such words as it becomes a slave to use. But thou should'st pardon all, who, in youth's impetuous heat, speak idle words of thee; make as though thou hearest not, for gods must needs be wiser than the sons of men.

(*The* LEADER *goes into the palace. The* CHORUS OF TROEZENIAN WOMEN *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

A rock there is, where, as they say, the ocean dew distils, and from its beetling brow it pours a copious stream for pitchers to be dipped therein; 'twas here I had a friend washing robes of purple in the trickling stream, and she was spreading them out on the face of a warm sunny rock; from her I had the tidings, first of all, that my mistress—

antistrophe 1

Was wasting on the bed of sickness, pent within her house, a thin veil o'ershadowing her head of golden hair. And this is the third day I hear that she hath closed her lovely lips and denied her chaste body all sustenance, eager to hide her suffering and reach death's cheerless bourn.

strophe 2

Maiden, thou must be possessed, by Pan made frantic or by Hecate, or by the Corybantes dread, and Cybele the mountain mother. Or maybe thou hast sinned against Dictynna, huntress-queen, and art wasting for thy guilt in sacrifice unoffered. For she doth range o'er lakes' expanse and past the bounds of earth upon the ocean's tossing billows.

antistrophe 2

Or doth some rival in thy house beguile thy lord, the captain of Erechtheus' sons, that hero nobly born, to secret amours hid from thee? Or hath some mariner sailing hither from Crete reached this port that sailors love, with evil tidings for our queen, and she with sorrow for her grievous fate is to her bed confined?

epode

Yea, and oft o'er woman's wayward nature settles a feeling of miserable helplessness, arising from pains of child-birth or of passionate desire. I, too, have felt at times this sharp thrill shoot through me, but I would cry to Artemis, queen of archery, who comes from heaven to aid us in our travail, and thanks to heaven's grace she ever comes at my call with welcome help. Look! where the aged nurse is bringing her forth from the house before the door, while on her brow the cloud of gloom is deepening. My soul longs to learn what is her grief, the canker that is wasting our queen's fading charms.

(PHAEDRA *is led out and placed upon a couch by the* NURSE *and attendants. The following lines between the* NURSE *and* PHAEDRA *are chanted.*)

NURSE

O, the ills of mortal men! the cruel diseases they endure! What can I do for thee? from what refrain? Here is the bright sun-light, here the azure sky; lo! we have brought thee on thy bed of sickness without the palace; for all thy talk was of coming hither, but soon back to thy chamber wilt thou hurry. Disappointment follows fast with thee, thou hast no joy in aught for long; the present has no power to please; on something absent next thy heart is set. Better be sick than tend the sick; the first is but a single ill, the last unites mental grief with manual toil. Man's whole life is full of anguish; no respite from his woes he finds; but if there is aught to love beyond this life, night's dark pall doth wrap it round. And so we show our mad love of this life because its light is shed on earth, and because we know no other, and have naught revealed to us of all our earth may hide; and trusting to fables we drift at random.

PHAEDRA (*wildly*)

Lift my body, raise my head! My limbs are all unstrung, kind friends. O handmaids, lift my arms, my shapely arms. The tire on my head is too heavy for me to wear; away with it, and let my tresses o'er my shoulders fall.

NURSE

Be of good heart, dear child; toss not so wildly to and fro. Lie still, be brave, so wilt thou find thy sickness easier to bear; suffering for mortals is nature's iron law.

PHAEDRA

Ah! would I could draw a draught of water pure from some dew-fed spring, and lay me down to rest in the grassy meadow 'neath the poplar's shade!

NURSE

My child, what wild speech is this? O say not such things in public, wild whirling words of frenzy bred!

PHAEDRA

Away to the mountain take me! to the wood, to the pine-trees I will go, where hounds pursue the prey, hard on the scent of dappled fawns. Ye gods! what joy to hark them on, to grasp the barbed dart, to poise Thessalian hunting-spears close to my golden hair, then let them fly.

NURSE

Why, why, my child, these anxious cares? What hast thou to do with the chase? Why so eager for the flowing spring, when hard by these towers stands a hill well watered, whence thou may'st freely draw?

PHAEDRA

O Artemis, who watchest o'er sea-beat Limna and the race-course thundering to the horse's hoofs, would I were upon thy plains curbing Venetian steeds!

NURSE

Why betray thy frenzy in these wild whirling words? Now thou wert for hasting hence to the hills away to hunt wild beasts, and now thy yearning is to drive the steed over the waveless sands. This needs a cunning seer to say what god it is that reins thee from the course, distracting thy senses, child.

PHAEDRA (*more sanely*)

Ah me! alas! what have I done? Whither have I strayed, my senses leaving? Mad, mad! stricken by some demon's curse! Woe is me! Cover my head again, nurse. Shame fills me for the words I have spoken. Hide me then; from my eyes the tear-drops stream, and for very shame I turn them away. 'Tis painful coming to one's senses

again, and madness, evil though it be, has this advantage, that one has no knowledge of reason's overthrow.

NURSE

There then I cover thee; but when will death hide my body in the grave? Many a lesson length of days is teaching me. Yea, mortal men should pledge themselves to moderate friendships only, not to such as reach the very heart's core; affection's ties should be light upon them to let them slip or draw them tight. For one poor heart to grieve for twain, as I do for my mistress, is a burden sore to bear. Men say that too engrossing pursuits in life more oft cause disappointment than pleasure, and too oft are foes to health. Wherefore I do not praise excess so much as moderation, and with me wise men will agree.

(PHAEDRA *lies back upon the couch.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*speaking*)

O aged dame, faithful nurse of Phaedra, our queen, we see her sorry plight; but what it is that ails her we cannot discern, so fain would learn of thee and hear thy opinion.

NURSE

I question her, but am no wiser, for she will not answer.

LEADER

Nor tell what source these sorrows have?

NURSE

The same answer thou must take, for she is dumb on every point.

LEADER

How weak and wasted is her body!

NURSE

What marvel? 'tis three days now since she has tasted food.

LEADER

Is this infatuation, or an attempt to die?

NURSE

'Tis death she courts; such fasting aims at ending life.

LEADER

A strange story if it satisfies her husband.

NURSE

She hides from him her sorrow, and vows she is not ill.

LEADER

Can he not guess it from her face?

NURSE

He is not now in his own country.

LEADER

But dost not thou insist in thy endeavour to find out her complaint, her crazy mind?

NURSE

I have tried every plan, and all in vain; yet not even now will I relax my zeal, that thou too, if thou stayest, mayst witness my devotion to my unhappy mistress. Come, come, my darling child, let us forget, the twain of us, our former words; be thou more mild, smoothing that sullen brow and changing the current of thy thought, and I, if in aught before I failed in humouring thee, will let that be and find some better course. If thou art sick with ills thou canst not name, there be women here to help to set thee right; but if thy trouble can to men's ears be divulged, speak, that physicians may pronounce on it. Come, then, why so dumb? Thou shouldst not so remain, my child, but scold me if I speak amiss, or, if I give good counsel, yield assent. One word, one look this way! Ah me! Friends, we waste our toil to no purpose; we are as far away as ever; she would not relent to my arguments then, nor is she yielding now. Well, grow more stubborn than the sea, yet be assured of this, that if thou diest thou art a traitress to thy children, for they will ne'er inherit their father's halls, nay, by that knightly queen the Amazon who bore a son to lord it over thine, a bastard born but not a bastard bred, whom well thou knowest, e'en Hippolytus—

(*At the mention of his name* PHAEDRA's *attention is suddenly caught.*)

PHAEDRA

Oh! oh!

NURSE

Ha! doth that touch the quick?

PHAEDRA

Thou hast undone me, nurse; I do adjure by the gods, mention that man no more.

NURSE

There now! thou art thyself again, but e'en yet refusest to aid thy children and preserve thy life.

PHAEDRA

My babes I love, but there is another storm that buffets me.

NURSE

Daughter, are thy hands from bloodshed pure?

PHAEDRA

My hands are pure, but on my soul there rests a stain.

NURSE

The issue of some enemy's secret witchery?

PHAEDRA

A friend is my destroyer, one unwilling as myself.

NURSE

Hath Theseus wronged thee in any wise?

PHAEDRA

Never may I prove untrue to him!

NURSE

Then what strange mystery is there that drives thee on to die?

PHAEDRA

O, let my sin and me alone! 'tis not 'gainst thee I sin.

NURSE

Never willingly! and, if I fail, 'twill rest at thy door.

PHAEDRA

How now? thou usest force in clinging to my hand.

NURSE

Yea, and I will never loose my hold upon thy knees.

PHAEDRA

Alas for thee! my sorrows, shouldst thou learn them, would recoil on thee.

NURSE

What keener grief for me than failing to win thee?

PHAEDRA

'Twill be death to thee; though to me that brings renown.

NURSE

And dost thou then conceal this boon despite my prayers?

PHAEDRA

I do, for 'tis out of shame I am planning an honourable escape.

NURSE

Tell it, and thine honour shall the brighter shine.

PHAEDRA

Away, I do conjure thee; loose my hand.

NURSE

I will not, for the boon thou shouldst have granted me is denied.

PHAEDRA

I will grant it out of reverence for thy holy suppliant touch.

NURSE

Henceforth I hold my peace; 'tis thine to speak from now.

PHAEDRA

Ah! hapless mother, what a love was thine!

NURSE

Her love for the bull? daughter, or what meanest thou?

PHAEDRA

And woe to thee! my sister, bride of Dionysus.

NURSE

What ails thee, child? speaking ill of kith and kin.

PHAEDRA

Myself the third to suffer! how am I undone!

NURSE

Thou strik'st me dumb! Where will this history end?

PHAEDRA

That "love" has been our curse from time long past.

NURSE

I know no more of what I fain would learn.

PHAEDRA

Ah! would thou couldst say for me what I have to tell.

NURSE

I am no prophetess to unriddle secrets.

PHAEDRA

What is it they mean when they talk of people being in "love"?

NURSE

At once the sweetest and the bitterest thing, my child.

PHAEDRA

I shall only find the latter half.

NURSE

Ha! my child, art thou in love?

PHAEDRA

The Amazon's son, whoever he may be—

NURSE

Mean'st thou Hippolytus?

PHAEDRA

'Twas thou, not I, that spoke his name.

NURSE

O heavens! what is this, my child? Thou hast ruined me. Outrageous! friends; I will not live and bear it; hateful is life, hateful to mine eyes the light. This body I resign, will cast it off, and rid me of existence by my death. Farewell, my life is o'er. Yea, for the chaste [1] have wicked passions, 'gainst their will maybe, but still they have. Cypris, it seems, is not a goddess after all, but something greater far, for she hath been the ruin of my lady and of me and our whole family.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O, too clearly didst thou hear our queen uplift her voice to tell her startling tale of piteous suffering. Come death ere I reach thy state of feeling, loved mistress. O horrible! woe, for these miseries! woe, for the sorrows on which mortals feed! Thou art undone! thou hast disclosed thy sin to heaven's light. What hath each passing day and every hour in store for thee? Some strange event will come to pass in this house. For it is no longer uncertain where the star of thy love is setting, thou hapless daughter of Crete.

PHAEDRA

Women of Troezen, who dwell here upon the frontier edge of Pelops' land, oft ere now in heedless mood through the long hours of night have I wondered why man's life is spoiled; and it seems to me their evil case is not due to any natural fault of judgment, for there be many dowered with sense, but we must view the matter in this light: by teaching and ex-

perience we learn the right but neglect it in practice, some from sloth, others from preferring pleasure of some kind or other to duty. Now life has many pleasures, protracted talk, and leisure, that seductive evil; likewise there is shame which is of two kinds, one a noble quality, the other a curse to families; but if for each its proper time were clearly known, these twain could not have had the selfsame letters to denote them. So then since I had made up my mind on these points, 'twas not likely any drug would alter it and make me think the contrary. And I will tell thee too the way my judgment went. When love wounded me, I bethought me how I best might bear the smart. So from that day forth I began to hide in silence what I suffered. For I put no faith in counsellors, who know well to lecture others for presumption, yet themselves have countless troubles of their own. Next I did devise noble endurance of these wanton thoughts, striving by continence for victory. And last when I could not succeed in mastering love hereby, methought it best to die; and none can gainsay my purpose. For fain I would my virtue should to all appear, my shame have few to witness it. I knew my sickly passion now; to yield to it I saw how infamous; and more, I learnt to know so well that I was but a woman, a thing the world detests. Curses, hideous curses on that wife who first did shame her marriage-vow for lovers other than her lord! 'Twas from noble families this curse began to spread among our sex. For when the noble countenance disgrace, poor folk of course will think that it is right. Those too I hate who make profession of purity,[1] though in secret reckless sinners. How can these, queen Cypris, ocean's child, e'er look their husbands in the face? do they never feel one guilty thrill that their accomplice, night, or the chambers of their house will find a voice and speak? This it is that calls on me to die, kind friends, that so I may ne'er be found to have disgraced my lord, or the children I have borne; no! may they grow up and dwell in glorious Athens, free to speak and act, heirs to such fair fame as a mother can bequeath. For to know that father or mother has sinned doth turn the stoutest heart to slavishness. This alone, men say, can stand the buffets of life's battle, a just and virtuous soul in whomsoever found. For time unmasks the villain soon or late, holding up to them a mirror as to some blooming maid. 'Mongst such may I be never seen!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Now look! how fair is chastity [1] however viewed, whose fruit is good repute amongst men.

NURSE

My queen, 'tis true thy tale of woe, but lately told, did for the moment strike me with wild alarm, but now I do reflect upon my foolishness;

second thoughts are often best even with men. Thy fate is no uncommon one nor past one's calculations; thou art stricken by the passion Cypris sends. Thou art in love; what wonder? so are many more. Wilt thou, because thou lov'st, destroy thyself? 'Tis little gain, I trow, for those who love or yet may love their fellows, if death must be their end; for though the Love-Queen's onset in her might is more than man can bear, yet doth she gently visit yielding hearts, and only when she finds a proud unnatural spirit, doth she take and mock it past belief. Her path is in the sky, and mid the ocean's surge she rides; from her all nature springs; she sows the seeds of love, inspires the warm desire to which we sons of earth all owe our being. They who have aught to do with books of ancient scribes, or themselves engage in studious pursuits, know how Zeus of Semele was enamoured, how the bright-eyed goddess of the Dawn once stole Cephalus to dwell in heaven for the love she bore him; yet these in heaven abide nor shun the gods' approach, content, I trow, to yield to their misfortune. Wilt thou refuse to yield? thy sire, it seems, should have begotten thee on special terms or with different gods for masters, if in these laws thou wilt not acquiesce. How many, prithee, men of sterling sense, when they see their wives unfaithful, make as though they saw it not? How many fathers, when their sons have gone astray, assist them in their amours? 'Tis part of human wisdom to conceal the deed of shame. Nor should man aim at too great refinement in his life; for they cannot with exactness finish e'en the roof that covers in a house; and how dost thou, after falling into so deep a pit, think to escape? Nay, if thou hast more of good than bad, thou wilt fare exceeding well, thy human nature considered. O cease, my darling child, from evil thoughts, let wanton pride be gone, for this is naught else, this wish to rival gods in perfectness. Face thy love; 'tis heaven's will thou shouldst. Sick thou art, yet turn thy sickness to some happy issue. For there are charms and spells to soothe the soul; surely some cure for thy disease will be found. Men, no doubt, might seek it long and late if our women's minds no scheme devise.

LEADER

Although she gives thee at thy present need the wiser counsel, Phaedra, yet do I praise thee. Still my praise may sound more harsh and jar more cruelly on thy ear than her advice.

PHAEDRA

'Tis even this, too plausible a tongue, that overthrows good governments and homes of men. We should not speak to please the ear but point the path that leads to noble fame.

NURSE

What means this solemn speech? Thou needst not rounded phrases,—but a man. Straightway must we move to tell him frankly how it is with thee. Had not thy life to such a crisis come, or wert thou with self-control [1] endowed, ne'er would I to gratify thy passions have urged thee to this course; but now 'tis a struggle fierce to save thy life, and therefore less to blame.

PHAEDRA

Accursed proposal! peace, woman! never utter those shameful words again!

NURSE

Shameful, maybe, yet for thee better than honour's code. Better this deed, if it shall save thy life, than that name thy pride will kill thee to retain.

PHAEDRA

I conjure thee, go no further! for thy words are plausible but infamous; for though as yet love has not undermined my soul, yet, if in specious words thou dress thy foul suggestion, I shall be beguiled into the snare from which I am now escaping.

NURSE

If thou art of this mind, 'twere well thou ne'er hadst sinned; but as it is, hear me; for that is the next best course; I in my house have charms to soothe thy love,—'twas but now I thought of them;—these shall cure thee of thy sickness on no disgraceful terms, thy mind unhurt, if thou wilt be but brave. But from him thou lovest we must get some token, a word or fragment of his robe, and thereby unite in one love's twofold stream.

PHAEDRA

Is thy drug a salve or potion?

NURSE

I cannot tell; be content, my child, to profit by it and ask no questions.

PHAEDRA

I fear me thou wilt prove too wise for me.

NURSE

If thou fear this, confess thyself afraid of all; but why thy terror?

PHAEDRA

Lest thou shouldst breathe a word of this to Theseus' son.

NURSE

Peace, my child! I will do all things well; only be thou, queen Cypris, ocean's child, my partner in the work! And for the rest of my purpose, it will be enough for me to tell it to our friends within the house.

(*The* NURSE *goes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O Love, Love, that from the eyes diffusest soft desire, bringing on the souls of those, whom thou dost camp against, sweet grace, O never in evil mood appear to me, nor out of time and tune approach! Nor fire nor meteor hurls a mightier bolt than Aphrodite's shaft shot by the hands of Love, the child of Zeus.

antistrophe 1

Idly, idly by the streams of Alpheus and in the Pythian shrines of Phoebus, Hellas heaps the slaughtered steers; while Love we worship not, Love, the king of men, who holds the key to Aphrodite's sweetest bower,—worship not him who, when he comes, lays waste and marks his path to mortal hearts by wide-spread woe.

strophe 2

There was that maiden [2] in Oechalia, a girl unwed, that knew no wooer yet nor married joys; her did the Queen of Love snatch from her home across the sea and gave unto Alcmena's son, mid blood and smoke and murderous marriage-hymns, to be to him a frantic fiend of hell; woe! woe for his wooing!

antistrophe 2

Ah! holy walls of Thebes, ah! fount of Dirce, ye could testify what course the love-queen follows. For with the blazing levin-bolt did she cut short the fatal marriage of Semele, mother of Zeus-born Bacchus. All things she doth inspire, dread goddess, winging her flight hither and thither like a bee.

PHAEDRA

Peace, oh women, peace! I am undone.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What, Phaedra, is this dread event within thy house?

PHAEDRA

Hush! let me hear what those within are saying.

LEADER

I am silent; this is surely the prelude to evil.

PHAEDRA (*chanting*)

Great gods! how awful are my sufferings!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

What a cry was there! what loud alarm! say what sudden terror, lady, doth thy soul dismay.

PHAEDRA

I am undone. Stand here at the door and hear the noise arising in the house.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Thou art already by the bolted door; 'tis for thee to note the sounds that issue from within. And tell me, O tell me what evil can be on foot.

PHAEDRA

'Tis the son of the horse-loving Amazon who calls, Hippolytus, uttering foul curses on my servant.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I hear a noise, but cannot clearly tell which way it comes. Ah! 'tis through the door the sound reached thee.

PHAEDRA

Yes, yes, he is calling her plainly enough a go-between in vice, traitress to her master's honour.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe, woe is me! thou art betrayed, dear mistress! What counsel shall I give thee? thy secret is out; thou art utterly undone.

PHAEDRA

Ah me! ah me!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Betrayed by friends!

PHAEDRA

She hath ruined me by speaking of my misfortune; 'twas kindly meant, but an ill way to cure my malady.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O what wilt thou do now in thy cruel dilemma?

PHAEDRA

I only know one way, one cure for these my woes, and that is instant death.

(HIPPOLYTUS *bursts out of the palace, followed closely by the* NURSE.)

HIPPOLYTUS

O mother earth! O sun's unclouded orb! What words, unfit for any lips, have reached my ears!

NURSE

Peace, my son, lest some one hear thy outcry.

HIPPOLYTUS

I cannot hear such awful words and hold my peace.

NURSE

I do implore thee by thy fair right hand.

HIPPOLYTUS

Let go my hand, touch not my robe.

NURSE

O by thy knees I pray, destroy me not utterly.

HIPPOLYTUS

Why say this, if, as thou pretendest, thy lips are free from blame?

NURSE

My son, this is no story to be noised abroad.

HIPPOLYTUS

A virtuous tale grows fairer told to many.

NURSE

Never dishonour thy oath, my son.

HIPPOLYTUS

My tongue an oath did take, but not my heart.[3]

NURSE

My son, what wilt thou do? destroy thy friends?

HIPPOLYTUS

Friends indeed! the wicked are no friends of mine.

NURSE

O pardon me; to err is only human, child.

HIPPOLYTUS

Great Zeus, why didst thou, to man's sorrow, put woman, evil counterfeit, to dwell where shines the sun? If thou wert minded that the human race should multiply, it was not from women they should have drawn their stock, but in thy temples they should have paid gold or iron or ponderous bronze and bought a family, each man proportioned to his offering, and so in independence dwelt, from women free. But now as soon as ever we would bring this plague into our home we bring its fortune to the ground. 'Tis clear from this how great a curse a woman is; the very father, that begot and nurtured her, to rid him of the mischief, gives her a dower and packs her off; while the husband, who takes the noxious weed into his home, fondly decks his sorry idol in fine raiment and tricks her out in robes, squandering by degrees, unhappy wight! his house's wealth. For he is in this dilemma; say his marriage has brought him good connections, he is glad then to keep the wife he loathes; or, if he gets a good wife but useless kin, he tries to stifle the bad luck with the good. But it is easiest for him who has settled in his house as wife a mere cipher,[4] incapable from simplicity. I hate a clever woman; never may she set foot in *my* house who aims at knowing more than women need; for in these clever women Cypris implants a larger store of villainy, while the artless woman is by her shallow wit from levity debarred. No servant should ever have had access to a wife, but men should put to live with them beasts, which bite, not talk, in which case they could not speak to any one nor be answered back by them. But, as it is, the wicked in their chambers plot wickedness, and their servants carry it abroad. Even thus, vile wretch, thou cam'st to make me partner in an outrage on my father's honour; wherefore I must wash that stain away in running streams, dashing the water into my ears. How could I commit so foul a crime when by the very mention of it I feel myself polluted? Be well assured, woman, 'tis only my religious scruple saves thee. For had not I unawares been caught by an oath, 'fore heaven! I would not have refrained from telling all unto my father. But now I will from the house away, so long as Theseus is abroad, and will maintain strict silence. But, when my father comes, I will return and see how thou and thy mistress face him, and so shall I learn by experience the extent of thy audacity. Perdition seize you both! I can never satisfy my hate for women, no! not even though some say this is ever my theme, for of a truth they always are evil. So either let some one prove them chaste,[1] or let me still trample on them for ever.

(HIPPOLYTUS *departs in anger.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O the cruel, unhappy fate of women! What arts, what arguments have we, once we have made a slip, to loose by craft the tight-drawn knot?

PHAEDRA (*chanting*)

I have met my deserts. O earth, O light of day! How can I escape the stroke of fate? How my pangs conceal, kind friends? What god will appear to help me, what mortal to take my part or help me in unrighteousness? The present calamity of my life admits of no escape. Most hapless I of all my sex!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Alas, alas! the deed is done, thy servant's schemes have gone awry, my queen, and all is lost.

PHAEDRA (*to the* NURSE)

Accursed woman! traitress to thy friends! How hast thou ruined me! May Zeus, my ancestor, smite thee with his fiery bolt and uproot thee from thy place. Did I not foresee thy purpose, did I not bid thee keep silence on the very matter which is now my shame? But thou wouldst not be still; wherefore my fair name will not go with me to the tomb. But now I must another scheme devise. Yon youth, in the keenness of his fury, will tell his father of my sin, and the aged Pittheus of my state, and fill the world with stories to my shame. Perdition seize thee and every meddling fool who by dishonest means would serve unwilling friends!

NURSE

Mistress, thou may'st condemn the mischief I have done, for sorrow's sting o'ermasters thy judgment; yet can I answer thee in face of this, if thou wilt hear. 'Twas I who nurtured thee; I love thee still; but in my search for medicine to cure thy sickness I found what least I sought. Had I but succeeded, I had been counted wise, for the credit we get for wisdom is measured by our success.

PHAEDRA

Is it just, is it any satisfaction to me, that thou shouldst wound me first, then bandy words with me?

NURSE

We dwell on this too long; I was not wise, I own; but there are yet ways of escape from the trouble, my child.

PHAEDRA

Be dumb henceforth; evil was thy first advice to me, evil too thy attempted scheme. Begone and leave me, look to thyself; I will my own fortunes for the best arrange.

(*The* NURSE *goes into the palace.*)

Ye noble daughters of Troezen, grant me the only boon I crave; in silence bury what ye here have heard.

LEADER

By majestic Artemis, child of Zeus, I swear I will never divulge aught of thy sorrows.

PHAEDRA

'Tis well. But I, with all my thought, can but one way discover out of this calamity, that so I may secure my children's honour, and find myself some help as matters stand. For never, never will I bring shame upon my Cretan home, nor will I, to save one poor life, face Theseus after my disgrace.

LEADER

Art thou bent then on some cureless woe?

PHAEDRA

On death; the means thereto must I devise myself.

LEADER

Hush!

PHAEDRA

Do thou at least advise me well. For this very day shall I gladden Cypris, my destroyer, by yielding up my life, and shall own myself vanquished by cruel love. Yet shall my dying be another's curse, that he may learn not to exult at my misfortunes; but when he comes to share the self-same plague with me, he will take a lesson in wisdom.[1]

(PHAEDRA *enters the palace.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 1

O to be nestling 'neath some pathless cavern, there by god's creating hand to grow into a bird amid the wingèd tribes! Away would I soar to Adria's wave-beat shore and to the waters of Eridanus; where a father's hapless daughters in their grief for Phaethon distil into the glooming flood the amber brilliance of their tears.

antistrophe 1

And to the apple-bearing strand of those minstrels in the west I then would come, where ocean's lord no more to sailors grants a passage o'er the deep dark main, finding there the heaven's holy bound, upheld by Atlas, where water from ambrosial founts wells up beside the couch of Zeus inside his halls, and holy earth, the bounteous mother, causes joy to spring in heavenly breasts.

strophe 2

O white-winged bark, that o'er the booming ocean-wave didst bring my royal mistress from her happy home, to crown her queen 'mongst sorrow's brides! Surely evil omens from either port, at least from Crete, were with that ship, what time to glorious Athens it sped its way, and the crew made fast its twisted cable-ends upon the beach of Munychus, and on the land stept out.

antistrophe 2

Whence comes it that her heart is crushed, cruelly afflicted by Aphrodite with unholy love; so she by bitter grief o'erwhelmed will tie a noose within her bridal bower to fit it to her fair white neck, too modest for this hateful lot in life, prizing o'er all her name and fame, and striving thus to rid her soul of passion's sting.

(*The* NURSE *rushes out of the palace.*)

NURSE

Help! ho! To the rescue all who near the palace stand! She hath hung herself, our queen, the wife of Theseus.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Woe worth the day! the deed is done; our royal mistress is no more, dead she hangs in the dangling noose.

NURSE

Haste! some one bring a two-edged knife wherewith to cut the knot about her neck.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Friends, what shall we do? think you we should enter the house, and loose the queen from the tight-drawn noose?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Why should *we?* Are there not young servants here? To do too much is not a safe course in life.

NURSE

Lay out the hapless corpse, straighten the limbs. This was a bitter way to sit at home and keep my master's house!

(*She goes in.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

She is dead, poor lady; 'tis this I hear. Already are they laying out the corpse.

(THESEUS *and his retinue have entered, unnoticed.*)

THESEUS

Women, can ye tell me what the uproar in the palace means? There came the sound of servants weeping bitterly to mine ear. None of my household deign to open wide the gates and give me glad welcome as a traveller from prophetic shrines. Hath aught befallen old Pittheus? No. Though he be well advanced in years, yet should I mourn, were he to quit this house.

LEADER

'Tis not against the old, Theseus, that fate, to strike thee, aims this blow; prepare thy sorrow for a younger corpse.

THESEUS

Woe is me! is it a child's life death robs me of?

LEADER

They live; but, cruellest news of all for thee, their mother is no more.

THESEUS

What! my wife dead? By what cruel stroke of chance?

LEADER

About her neck she tied the hangman's knot.

THESEUS

Had grief so chilled her blood? or what had befallen her?

LEADER

I know but this, for I am myself but now arrived at the house to mourn thy sorrows, O Theseus.

THESEUS

Woe is me! why have I crowned my head with woven garlands, when misfortune greets my embassage? Unbolt the doors, servants, loose their fastenings, that I may see the piteous sight, my wife, whose death is death to me.

(*The central doors of the palace open, disclosing the corpse.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe! woe is thee for thy piteous lot! thou hast done thyself a hurt deep enough to overthrow this family. Ah! ah! the daring of it! done to death by violence and unnatural means, the desperate effort of thy own poor hand! Who cast the shadow o'er thy life, poor lady?

THESEUS (*chanting*)

Ah me, my cruel lot! sorrow hath done her worst on me. O fortune, how heavily hast thou set thy foot on me and on my house, by fiendish hands inflicting an unexpected stain? Nay, 'tis complete effacement of my life, making it not to be lived; for I see, alas! so wide an ocean of grief that I can never swim to shore again, nor breast the tide of this calamity. How shall I speak of thee, my poor wife, what tale of direst suffering tell? Thou art vanished like a bird from the covert of my hand, taking one headlong leap from me to Hades' halls. Alas, and woe! this is a bitter, bitter sight! This must be a judgment sent by God for the sins of an ancestor, which from some far source I am bringing on myself.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

My prince, 'tis not to thee alone such sorrows come; thou hast lost a noble wife, but so have many others.

THESEUS (*chanting*)

Fain would I go hide me 'neath earth's blackest depth, to dwell in darkness with the dead in misery, now that I am reft of thy dear presence! for thou hast slain me than thyself e'en more. Who can tell me what caused the fatal stroke that reached thy heart, dear wife? Will no one tell me what befell? doth my palace all in vain give shelter to a herd of menials? Woe, woe for thee, my wife! sorrows past speech, past bearing, I behold within my house; myself a ruined man, my home a solitude, my children orphans!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Gone and left us hast thou, fondest wife and noblest of all women 'neath the sun's bright eye or night's star-lit radiance. Poor house, what sorrows are thy portion now! My eyes are wet with streams of tears to see thy fate; but the ill that is to follow has long with terror filled me.

THESEUS

Ha! what means this letter? clasped in her dear hand it hath some strange tale to tell. Hath she, poor lady, as a last request, written her bidding as to my marriage and her children? Take heart, poor ghost; no wife henceforth shall wed thy Theseus or invade his house. Ah! how yon

seal of my dead wife stamped with her golden ring affects my sight! Come, I will unfold the sealed packet and read her letter's message to me.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe unto us! Here is yet another evil in the train by heaven sent. Looking to what has happened, I should count my lot in life no longer worth one's while to gain. My master's house, alas! is ruined, brought to naught, I say. Spare it, O Heaven, if it may be. Hearken to my prayer, for I see, as with prophetic eye, an omen boding ill.

THESEUS

O horror! woe on woe! and still they come, too deep for words, too heavy to bear. Ah me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What is it? speak, if I may share in it.

THESEUS (*chanting*)

This letter loudly tells a hideous tale! where can I escape my load of woe? For I am ruined and undone, so awful are the words I find here written clear as if she cried them to me; woe is me!

LEADER

Alas! thy words declare themselves the harbingers of woe.

THESEUS

I can no longer keep the cursed tale within the portal of my lips, cruel though its utterance be. Ah me! Hippolytus hath dared by brutal force to violate my honour, recking naught of Zeus, whose awful eye is over all. O father Poseidon, once didst thou promise to fulfil three prayers of mine; answer one of these and slay my son, let him not escape this single day, if the prayers thou gavest me were indeed with issue fraught.

LEADER

O king, I do conjure thee, call back that prayer; hereafter thou wilt know thy error. Hear, I pray.

THESEUS

It cannot be! Moreover I will banish him from this land, and by one of two fates shall he be struck down; either Poseidon, out of respect to my prayer, will cast his dead body into the house of Hades; or exiled from this land, a wanderer to some foreign shore, shall he eke out a life of misery.

LEADER

Lo! where himself doth come, thy son Hippolytus, in good time; dismiss thy hurtful rage, King Theseus, and bethink thee what is best for thy house.

(HIPPOLYTUS *enters.*)

HIPPOLYTUS

I heard thy voice, father, and hasted to come hither; yet know I not the cause of thy present sorrow, but would fain learn of thee.

(*He sees* PHAEDRA'S *body.*)

Ha! what is this? thy wife is dead? 'Tis very strange; it was but now I left her; a moment since she looked upon the light. How came she thus? the manner of her death? this would I learn of thee, father. Art dumb? silence availeth not in trouble; nay, for the heart that fain would know all must show its curiosity even in sorrow's hour. Be sure it is not right, father, to hide misfortunes from those who love, ay, more than love thee.

THESEUS

O ye sons of men, victims of a thousand idle errors, why teach your countless crafts, why scheme and seek to find a way for everything, while one thing ye know not nor ever yet have made your prize, a way to teach them wisdom whose souls are void of sense?

HIPPOLYTUS

A very master in his craft the man, who can force fools to be wise! But these ill-timed subtleties of thine, father, make me fear thy tongue is running wild through trouble.

THESEUS

Fie upon thee! man needs should have some certain test set up to try his friends, some touchstone of their hearts, to know each friend whether he be true or false; all men should have two voices, one the voice of honesty, expediency's the other, so would honesty confute its knavish opposite, and then we could not be deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS

Say, hath some friend been slandering me and hath he still thine ear? and I, though guiltless, banned? I am amazed, for thy random, frantic words fill me with wild alarm.

THESEUS

O the mind of mortal man! to what lengths will it proceed? What limit will its bold assurance have? for if it goes on growing as man's life advances, and each successor outdo the man before him in villainy, the gods will have to add another sphere unto the world, which shall take in

the knaves and villains. Behold this man; he, my own son, hath outraged mine honour, his guilt most clearly proved by my dead wife. Now, since thou hast dared this loathly crime, come, look thy father in the face. Art thou the man who dost with gods consort, as one above the vulgar herd? art thou the chaste [1] and sinless saint? Thy boasts will never persuade me to be guilty of attributing ignorance to gods. Go then, vaunt thyself, and drive thy petty trade in viands formed of lifeless food; [5] take Orpheus for thy chief and go a-revelling, with all honour for the vapourings of many a written scroll, seeing thou now art caught. Let all beware, I say, of such hypocrites! who hunt their prey with fine words, and all the while are scheming villainy. She is dead; dost think that this will save thee? Why this convicts thee more than all, abandoned wretch! What oaths, what pleas can outweigh this letter, so that thou shouldst 'scape thy doom? Thou wilt assert she hated thee, that 'twixt the bastard and the true-born child nature has herself put war; it seems then by thy showing she made a sorry bargain with her life, if to gratify her hate of thee she lost what most she prized. 'Tis said, no doubt, that frailty finds no place in man but is innate in woman; my experience is, young men are no more secure than women, whenso the Queen of Love excites a youthful breast; although their sex comes in to help them. Yet why do I thus bandy words with thee, when before me lies the corpse, to be the clearest witness? Begone at once, an exile from this land, and ne'er set foot again in god-built Athens nor in the confines of my dominion. For if I am tamely to submit to this treatment from such as thee, no more will Sinis, robber of the Isthmus, bear me witness how I slew him, but say my boasts are idle, nor will those rocks Scironian, that fringe the sea, call me the miscreants' scourge.

LEADER

I know not how to call happy any child of man; for that which was first has turned and now is last.

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, thy wrath and the tension of thy mind are terrible; yet this charge, specious though its arguments appear, becomes a calumny, if one lay it bare. Small skill have I in speaking to a crowd, but have a readier wit for comrades of mine own age and small companies. Yea, and this is as it should be; for they, whom the wise despise, are better qualified to speak before a mob. Yet am I constrained under the present circumstances to break silence. And at the outset will I take the point which formed the basis of thy stealthy attack on me, designed to put me out of court unheard; dost see yon sun, this earth? These do not contain, for all thou dost deny it, chastity [1] surpassing mine. To reverence God I count the highest knowledge, and to adopt as friends not those who attempt in-

justice, but such as would blush to propose to their companions aught disgraceful or pleasure them by shameful services; to mock at friends is not my way, father, but I am still the same behind their backs as to their face. The very crime thou thinkest to catch me in, is just the one I am untainted with, for to this day have I kept me pure from women. Nor know I aught thereof, save what I hear or see in pictures, for I have no wish to look even on these, so pure my virgin soul. I grant my claim to chastity [1] may not convince thee; well, 'tis then for thee to show the way I was corrupted. Did this woman exceed in beauty all her sex? Did I aspire to fill the husband's place after thee and succeed to thy house? That surely would have made me out a fool, a creature void of sense. Thou wilt say, "Your chaste [1] man loves to lord it." No, no! say I, sovereignty pleases only those whose hearts are quite corrupt. Now, I would be the first and best at all the games in Hellas, but second in the state, for ever happy thus with the noblest for my friends. For there one may be happy, and the absence of danger gives a charm beyond all princely joys. One thing I have not said, the rest thou hast. Had I a witness to attest my purity, and were I pitted 'gainst her still alive, facts would show thee on enquiry who the culprit was. Now by Zeus, the god of oaths, and by the earth, whereon we stand, I swear to thee I never did lay hand upon thy wife nor would have wished to, or have harboured such a thought. Slay me, ye gods! rob me of name and honour, from home and city cast me forth, a wandering exile o'er the earth! nor sea nor land receive my bones when I am dead, if I am such a miscreant! I cannot say if she through fear destroyed herself, for more than this am I forbid. With her discretion took the place of chastity,[1] while I, though chaste, was not discreet in using this virtue.

LEADER

Thy oath by heaven, strong security, sufficiently refutes the charge.

THESEUS

A wizard or magician must the fellow be, to think he can first flout me, his father, then by coolness master my resolve.

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, thy part in this doth fill me with amaze; wert thou my son and I thy sire, by heaven! I would have slain, not let thee off with banishment, hadst thou presumed to violate my honour.

THESEUS

A just remark! yet shalt thou not die by the sentence thine own lips pronounce upon thyself; for death, that cometh in a moment, is an easy end for wretchedness. Nay, thou shalt be exiled from thy fatherland, and

wandering to a foreign shore drag out a life of misery; for such are the wages of sin.

HIPPOLYTUS

Oh! what wilt thou do? Wilt thou banish me, without so much as waiting for Time's evidence on my case?

THESEUS

Ay, beyond the sea, beyond the bounds of Atlas, if I could, so deeply do I hate thee.

HIPPOLYTUS

What! banish me untried, without even testing my oath, the pledge I offer, or the voice of seers?

THESEUS

This letter here, though it bears no seers' signs, arraigns thy pledges; as for birds that fly o'er our heads, a long farewell to them.

HIPPOLYTUS (*aside*)

Great gods! why do I not unlock my lips, seeing that I am ruined by you, the objects of my reverence? No, I will not; I should nowise persuade those whom I ought to, and in vain should break the oath I swore.

THESEUS

Fie upon thee! that solemn air of thine is more than I can bear. Begone from thy native land forthwith!

HIPPOLYTUS

Whither shall I turn? Ah me! whose friendly house will take me in, an exile on so grave a charge?

THESEUS

Seek one who loves to entertain as guests and partners in his crimes corrupters of men's wives.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah me! this wounds my heart and brings me nigh to tears to think that I should appear so vile, and thou believe me so.

THESEUS

Thy tears and forethought had been more in season when thou didst presume to outrage thy father's wife.

HIPPOLYTUS

O house, I would thou couldst speak for me and witness if I am so vile!

THESEUS

Dost fly to speechless witnesses? This deed, though it speaketh not, proves thy guilt clearly.

HIPPOLYTUS

Alas! Would I could stand and face myself, so should I weep to see the sorrows I endure.

THESEUS

Ay, 'tis thy character to honour thyself far more than reverence thy parents, as thou shouldst.

HIPPOLYTUS

Unhappy mother! son of sorrow! Heaven keep all friends of mine from bastard birth!

THESEUS

Ho! servants, drag him hence! You heard my proclamation long ago condemning him to exile.

HIPPOLYTUS

Whoso of them doth lay a hand on me shall rue it; thyself expel me, if thy spirit move thee, from the land.

THESEUS

I will, unless my word thou straight obey; no pity for thy exile steals into my heart.

(THESEUS *goes in. The central doors of the palace are closed.*)

HIPPOLYTUS

The sentence then, it seems, is passed. Ah, misery! How well I know the truth herein, but know no way to tell it! O daughter of Latona, dearest to me of all deities, partner, comrade in the chase, far from glorious Athens must I fly. Farewell, city and land of Erechtheus; farewell, Troezen, most joyous home wherein to pass the spring of life; 'tis my last sight of thee, farewell! Come, my comrades in this land, young like me, greet me kindly and escort me forth, for never will ye behold a purer[1] soul, for all my father's doubts.

(HIPPOLYTUS *departs. Many follow him.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

In very deed the thoughts I have about the gods, whenso they come into my mind, do much to soothe its grief, but though I cherish secret hopes of some great guiding will, yet am I at fault when I survey the fate and doings of the sons of men; change succeeds to change, and man's life veers and shifts in endless restlessness.

antistrophe 1

Fortune grant me this, I pray, at heaven's hand,—a happy lot in life and a soul from sorrow free; opinions let me hold not too precise nor yet too hollw; but, lightly changing my habits to each morrow as it comes, may I thus attain a life of bliss!

strophe 2

For now no more is my mind free from doubts, unlooked-for sights greet my vision; for lo! I see the morning star of Athens, eye of Hellas, driven by his father's fury to another land. Mourn, ye sands of my native shores, ye oak-groves on the hills, where with his fleet hounds he would hunt the quarry to the death, attending on Dictynna, awful queen.

antistrophe 2

No more will he mount his car drawn by Venetian steeds, filling the course round Limna with the prancing of his trained horses. Nevermore in his father's house shall he wake the Muse that never slept beneath his lute-strings; no hand will crown the spots where rests the maiden Latona 'mid the boskage deep; nor evermore shall our virgins vie to win thy love, now thou art banished.

epode

While I with tears at thy unhappy fate shall endure a lot all undeserved. Ah! hapless mother, in vain didst thou bring forth, it seems. I am angered with the gods; out upon them! O ye linkèd Graces, why are ye sending from his native land this poor youth, a guiltless sufferer, far from his home?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But lo! I see a servant of Hippolytus hasting with troubled looks towards the palace.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Ladies, where may I find Theseus, king of the country? pray, tell me if ye know; is he within the palace here?

LEADER

Lo! himself approaches from the palace.

(THESEUS *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Theseus, I am the bearer of troublous tidings to thee and all citizens who dwell in Athens or the bounds of Troezen.

THESEUS

How now? hath some strange calamity o'ertaken these two neighbouring cities?

MESSENGER

In one brief word, Hippolytus is dead. 'Tis true one slender thread still links him to the light of life.

THESEUS

Who slew him? Did some husband come to blows with him, one whose wife, like mine, had suffered brutal violence?

MESSENGER

He perished through those steeds that drew his chariot, and through the curses thou didst utter, praying to thy sire, the ocean-king, to slay thy son.

THESEUS

Ye gods and king Poseidon, thou hast proved my parentage by hearkening to my prayer! Say how he perished; how fell the uplifted hand of Justice to smite the villain who dishonoured me?

MESSENGER

Hard by the wave-beat shore were we combing out his horses' manes, weeping the while, for one had come to say that Hippolytus was harshly exiled by thee and nevermore would return to set foot in this land. Then came he, telling the same doleful tale to us upon the beach, and with him was a countless throng of friends who followed after. At length he stayed his lamentation and spake: "Why weakly rave on this wise? My father's commands must be obeyed. Ho! servants, harness my horses to the chariot; this is no longer now city of mine." Thereupon each one of us bestirred himself, and, ere a man could say 'twas done, we had the horses standing ready at our master's side. Then he caught up the reins from the chariot-rail, first fitting his feet exactly in the hollows made for them. But first with outspread palms he called upon the gods, "O Zeus, now strike me dead, if I have sinned, and let my father learn how he is wronging me, in death at least, if not in life." Therewith he seized the whip and lashed each horse in turn; while we, close by his chariot, near the reins, kept up with him along the road that leads direct to Argos and Epidaurus. And just as we were coming to a desert spot, a strip of sand beyond the borders of this country, sloping right to the Saronic gulf,

there issued thence a deep rumbling sound, as it were an earthquake, a fearsome noise, and the horses reared their heads and pricked their ears, while we were filled with wild alarm to know whence came the sound; when, as we gazed toward the wave-beat shore, a wave tremendous we beheld towering to the skies, so that from our view the cliffs of Sciron vanished, for it hid the isthmus and the rock of Asclepius; then swelling and frothing with a crest of foam, the sea discharged it toward the beach where stood the harnessed car, and in the moment that it broke, that mighty wall of waters, there issued from the wave a monstrous bull, whose bellowing filled the land with fearsome echoes, a sight too awful as it seemed to us who witnessed it. A panic seized the horses there and then, but our master, to horses' ways quite used, gripped in both hands his reins, and tying them to his body pulled them backward as the sailor pulls his oar; but the horses gnashed the forged bits between their teeth and bore him wildly on, regardless of their master's guiding hand or rein or jointed car. And oft as he would take the guiding rein and steer for softer ground, showed that bull in front to turn him back again, maddening his team with terror; but if in their frantic career they ran towards the rocks, he would draw nigh the chariot-rail, keeping up with them, until, suddenly dashing the wheel against a stone, he upset and wrecked the car; then was dire confusion, axle-boxes and linchpins springing into the air. While he, poor youth, entangled in the reins was dragged along, bound by a stubborn knot, his poor head dashed against the rocks, his flesh all torn, the while he cried out piteously, "Stay, stay, my horses whom my own hand hath fed at the manger, destroy me not utterly. O luckless curse of a father! Will no one come and save me for all my virtue?" Now we, though much we longed to help, were left far behind. At last, I know not how, he broke loose from the shapely reins that bound him, a faint breath of life still in him; but the horses disappeared, and that portentous bull, among the rocky ground, I know not where. I am but a slave in thy house, 'tis true, O king, yet will I never believe so monstrous a charge against thy son's character, no! not though the whole race of womankind should hang itself, or one should fill with writing every pine-tree tablet grown on Ida, sure as I am of his uprightness.

LEADER

Alas! new troubles come to plague us, nor is there any escape from fate and necessity.

THESEUS

My hatred for him who hath thus suffered made me glad at thy tidings, yet from regard for the gods and him, because he is my son, I feel neither joy nor sorrow at his sufferings.

MESSENGER

But say, are we to bring the victim hither, or how are we to fulfil thy wishes? Bethink thee; if by me thou wilt be schooled, thou wilt not harshly treat thy son in his sad plight.

THESEUS

Bring him hither, that when I see him face to face, who hath denied having polluted my wife's honour, I may by words and heaven's visitation convict him.

(*The* MESSENGER *departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ah! Cypris, thine the hand that guides the stubborn hearts of gods and men; thine, and that attendant boy's, who, with painted plumage gay, flutters round his victims on lightning wing. O'er the land and booming deep on golden pinion borne flits the god of Love, maddening the heart and beguiling the senses of all whom he attacks, savage whelps on mountains bred, ocean's monsters, creatures of this sun-warmed earth, and man; thine, O Cypris, thine alone the sovereign power to rule them all.

(ARTEMIS *appears above.*)

ARTEMIS (*chanting*)

Hearken, I bid thee, noble son of Aegeus: lo! 'tis I, Latona's child, that speak, I, Artemis. Why, Theseus, to thy sorrow dost thou rejoice at these tidings, seeing that thou hast slain thy son most impiously, listening to a charge not clearly proved, but falsely sworn to by thy wife? though clearly has the curse therefrom upon thee fallen. Why dost thou not for very shame hide beneath the dark places of the earth, or change thy human life and soar on wings to escape this tribulation? 'Mongst men of honour thou hast now no share in life.

(*She now speaks.*)

Hearken, Theseus; I will put thy wretched case. Yet will it naught avail thee, if I do, but vex thy heart; still with this intent I came, to show thy son's pure heart,—that he may die with honour,—as well the frenzy and, in a sense, the nobleness of thy wife; for she was cruelly stung with a passion for thy son by that goddess whom all we, that joy in virgin purity, detest. And though she strove to conquer love by resolution, yet by no fault of hers she fell, thanks to her nurse's strategy, who did reveal her malady unto thy son under oath. But he would none of her counsels, as indeed was right, nor yet, when thou didst revile him, would he break the oath he swore, from piety. She meantime, fearful of

being found out, wrote a lying letter, destroying by guile thy son, but yet persuading thee.

THESEUS

Woe is me!

ARTEMIS

Doth my story wound thee, Theseus? Be still awhile; hear what follows, so wilt thou have more cause to groan. Dost remember those three prayers thy father granted thee, fraught with certain issue? 'Tis one of these thou hast misused, unnatural wretch, against thy son, instead of aiming it at an enemy. Thy sea-god sire, 'tis true, for all his kind intent, hath granted that boon he was compelled, by reason of his promise, to grant. But thou alike in his eyes and in mine hast shewn thy evil heart, in that thou hast forestalled all proof or voice prophetic, hast made no inquiry, nor taken time for consideration, but with undue haste cursed thy son even to the death.

THESEUS

Perdition seize me! Queen revered!

ARTEMIS

An awful deed was thine, but still even for this thou mayest obtain pardon; for it was Cypris that would have it so, sating the fury of her soul. For this is law amongst us gods; none of us will thwart his neighbour's will, but ever we stand aloof. For be well assured, did I not fear Zeus, never would I have incurred the bitter shame of handing over to death a man of all his kind to me most dear. As for thy sin, first thy ignorance absolves thee from its villainy, next thy wife, who is dead, was lavish in her use of convincing arguments to influence thy mind. On thee in chief this storm of woe hath burst, yet is it some grief to me as well; for when the righteous die, there is no joy in heaven, albeit we try to destroy the wicked, house and home.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Lo! where he comes, this hapless youth, his fair young flesh and auburn locks most shamefully handled. Unhappy house! what twofold sorrow doth o'ertake its halls, through heaven's ordinance!

(HIPPOLYTUS *enters, assisted by his attendants.*)

HIPPOLYTUS (*chanting*)

Ah! ah! woe is me! foully undone by an impious father's impious imprecation! Undone, undone! woe is me! Through my head dart fearful pains; my brain throbs convulsively. Stop, let me rest my worn-out frame. Oh, oh! Accursed steeds, that mine own hand did

feed, ye have been my ruin and my death. O by the gods, good sirs, I beseech ye, softly touch my wounded limbs. Who stands there at my right side? Lift me tenderly; with slow and even step conduct a poor wretch cursed by his mistaken sire. Great Zeus, dost thou see this? Me thy reverent worshipper, me who left all men behind in purity,[1] plunged thus into yawning Hades 'neath the earth, reft of life; in vain the toils I have endured through my piety towards mankind. Ah me! ah me! O the thrill of anguish shooting through me! Set me down, poor wretch I am; come Death to set me free! Kill me, end my sufferings. O for a sword two-edged to hack my flesh, and close this mortal life! Ill-fated curse of my father! the crimes of bloody kinsmen, ancestors of old, now pass their boundaries and tarry not, and upon me are they come all guiltless as I am; ah! why? Alas, alas! what can I say? How from my life get rid of this relentless agony? O that the stern Death-god, night's black visitant, would give my sufferings rest!

ARTEMIS

Poor sufferer! cruel the fate that links thee to it! Thy noble soul hath been thy ruin.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah! the fragrance from my goddess wafted! Even in my agony I feel thee near and find relief; she is here in this very place, my goddess Artemis.

ARTEMIS

She is, poor sufferer! the goddess thou hast loved the best.

HIPPOLYTUS

Dost see me, mistress mine? dost see my present suffering?

ARTEMIS

I see thee, but mine eyes no tear may weep.

HIPPOLYTUS

Thou hast none now to lead the hunt or tend thy fane.

ARTEMIS

None now; yet e'en in death I love thee still.

HIPPOLYTUS

None to groom thy steeds, or guard thy shrines.

ARTEMIS

'Twas Cypris, mistress of iniquity, devised this evil.

HIPPOLYTUS
Ah me! now know I the goddess who destroyed me.

ARTEMIS
She was jealous of her slighted honour, vexed at thy chaste life.[1]

HIPPOLYTUS
Ah! then I see her single hand hath struck down three of us.

ARTEMIS
Thy sire and thee, and last thy father's wife.

HIPPOLYTUS
My sire's ill-luck as well as mine I mourn.

ARTEMIS
He was deceived by a goddess's design.

HIPPOLYTUS
Woe is thee, my father, in this sad mischance!

THESEUS
My son, I am a ruined man; life has no joys for me.

HIPPOLYTUS
For this mistake I mourn thee rather than myself.

THESEUS
O that I had died for thee, my son!

HIPPOLYTUS
Ah! those fatal gifts thy sire Poseidon gave.

THESEUS
Would God these lips had never uttered that prayer!

HIPPOLYTUS
Why not? thou wouldst in any case have slain me in thy fury then.

THESEUS
Yes; Heaven had perverted my power to think.

HIPPOLYTUS
O that the race of men could bring a curse upon the gods!

ARTEMIS
Enough! for though thou pass to gloom beneath the earth, the wrath of Cypris shall not, at her will, fall on thee unrequited, because thou hadst

a noble righteous soul. For I with mine own hand will with these unerring shafts avenge me on another,[6] who is her votary, dearest to her of all the sons of men. And to thee, poor sufferer, for thy anguish now will I grant high honours in the city of Troezen; for thee shall maids unwed before their marriage cut off their hair, thy harvest through the long roll of time of countless bitter tears. Yea, and for ever shall the virgin choir hymn thy sad memory, nor shall Phaedra's love for thee fall into oblivion and pass away unnoticed. But thou, O son of old Aegeus, take thy son in thine arms, draw him close to thee, for unwittingly thou slewest him, and men may well commit an error when gods put it in their way. And thee Hippolytus, I admonish; hate not thy sire, for in this death thou dost but meet thy destined fate. And now farewell! 'tis not for me to gaze upon the dead, or pollute my sight with death-scenes, and e'en now I see thee nigh that evil.

(ARTEMIS *vanishes.*)

HIPPOLYTUS

Farewell, blest virgin queen! leave me now! Easily thou resignest our long friendship! I am reconciled with my father at thy desire, yea, for ever before I would obey thy bidding. Ah me! the darkness is settling even now upon my eyes. Take me, father, in thy arms, lift me up.

THESEUS

Woe is me, my son! what art thou doing to me thy hapless sire!

HIPPOLYTUS

I am a broken man; yes, I see the gates that close upon the dead.

THESEUS

Canst leave me thus with murder on my soul!

HIPPOLYTUS

No, no; I set thee free from this bloodguiltiness.

THESEUS

What sayest thou? dost absolve me from bloodshed?

HIPPOLYTUS

Artemis, the archer-queen, is my witness that I do.

THESEUS

My own dear child, how generous dost thou show thyself to thy father!

HIPPOLYTUS

Farewell, dear father! a long farewell to thee!

THESEUS

O that holy, noble soul of thine!

HIPPOLYTUS

Pray to have children such as me born in lawful wedlock.

THESEUS

O leave me not, my son; endure awhile.

HIPPOLYTUS

'Tis finished, my endurance; I die, father; quickly veil my face with a mantle.

THESEUS

O glorious Athens, realm of Pallas, what a splendid hero ye have lost! Ah me, ah me! How oft shall I remember thy evil works, O Cypris!

CHORUS (*singing*)

On all our citizens hath come this universal sorrow, unforeseen.
Now shall the copious tear gush forth, for sad news about great men takes more than usual hold upon the heart.

NOTES FOR HIPPOLYTUS

COLERIDGE's translation has been slightly altered in the following lines: 40, 95, 163–164, 278, 467, 636, 788, 801, 821, 855, 893, 901, 905–906, 924, 934, 1351, 1441, 1458.

1. All the words with which this note is keyed are Coleridge's renderings of the same Greek word in the original, *sophrosyne,* either in the nominal, adjectival, or verbal form. It appears so frequently in the Greek text at important points that it comes to be a conception central to the meaning of the whole play. In a sense Euripides is endeavouring to make clear what real *sophrosyne* actually is. It is impossible to find a single English word which will carry its entire meaning. Coleridge's usual renderings, "chastity" or "purity" must be supplemented by the connotations of self-restraint, moderation, temperance and self-control.

2. This refers to the story of Heracles and Iole. Cf. Sophocles, *The Trachiniae.*

3. Cf. Aristophanes *Frogs,* lines 101–102, and 1471.

4. Cf. note on line 638 in J. E. Harry's edition of the *Hippolytus.*

5. Theseus is taunting Hippolytus for being associated with the Orphic mysteries.

6. This refers to Adonis.

IV
HECUBA

Characters in the Play

The Ghost of Polydorus, *son of* Hecuba *and Priam, King of Troy*
Hecuba, *wife of Priam*
Chorus of Captive Trojan Women
Polyxena, *daughter of* Hecuba *and Priam*
Odysseus
Talthybius, *herald of* Agamemnon
Maid of Hecuba
Agamemnon
Polymestor, *King of the Thracian Chersonese*
Children of Polymestor, *Attendants, and guards*

INTRODUCTION

THE date when Euripides presented his *Hecuba* is not precisely known. Available evidence indicates that it was produced about the year 425 B.C., some three or four years after the appearance of the *Hippolytus*. The play is the first of those now extant wherein the poet turns to the legends of the Trojan War for his material. He chooses as his central figure, Hecuba, the queen of the fallen city. She is now the slave of Agamemnon, leader of the conquering Greek host which, as the play opens, is on the point of sailing home. Although the *Hecuba* is often regarded as the first of Euripides' series of "war plays," the high point of which is, of course, the pageant-like *Trojan Women*, the emphasis in the play is less upon the horrors of war as they are manifested in the character of Hecuba, than upon the psychological analysis of the character and its reaction to manifold sufferings, which only in part derive from war.

The *Hecuba* is sharply divided into two parts. The first deals with the sacrifice of Polyxena, daughter of the queen, whom the Greeks have cruelly voted to slay in order to appease and honour the spirit of Achilles. The second part reveals Hecuba as she exacts her vengeance from the king of Thrace, Polymestor, to whom she had entrusted her young son, Polydorus, for safe keeping during the course of the war. Polymestor, when the war ended, treacherously killed the youth to gain the sum of money which had been given him to hold in trust when he accepted the guardianship. Hecuba, by chance, discovers Polydorus' death, and then takes steps towards her revenge. The two sections of the play are integrated through the medium of Hecuba's character, and only by this means does the poet manage to achieve a requisite degree of artistic unity for his piece.

In the first half of the play, Hecuba, comforted by the fact that she has two children left, Polyxena and Polydorus, endures the ghastly experience of seeing her daughter carried off to death. She is strengthened by the calm courage displayed by Polyxena, who with nobility and dignity goes forth to meet her doom. Surely one of the finest passages in Euripides is the speech of Talthybius, the Greek herald, describing how she died. In the latter section, the discovery of the death of Polydorus hardens Hecuba into cold-blooded unemotional bitterness. She revenges herself on Poly-

mestor with horrible ferocity, yet the effect of this half of the play, as critics generally hold, is marred by the almost formal debate carried on between Hecuba and Polymestor before Agamemnon, who is acting in the rôle of judge. Despite this defect, the delineation of Hecuba is notable, and the poet has portrayed her effectively as she passes from a state of abject despair into one of cold fury.

HECUBA

(SCENE:—*Before* AGAMEMNON'S *tent in the Greek camp upon the shore of the Thracian Chersonese. The* GHOST OF POLYDORUS *appears.*)

GHOST

Lo! I AM come from out the charnel-house and gates of gloom, where Hades dwells apart from gods, I Polydorus, a son of Hecuba the daughter of Cisseus and of Priam. Now my father, when Phrygia's capital was threatened with destruction by the spear of Hellas, took alarm and conveyed me secretly from the land of Troy unto Polymestor's house, his friend in Thrace, who sows these fruitful plains of Chersonese, curbing by his might a nation delighting in horses. And with me my father sent great store of gold by stealth, that, if ever Ilium's walls should fall, his children that survived might not want for means to live. I was the youngest of Priam's sons; and this it was that caused my stealthy removal from the land; for my childish arm availed not to carry weapons or to wield the spear. So long then as the bulwarks of our land stood firm, and Troy's battlements abode unshaken, and my brother Hector prospered in his warring, I, poor child, grew up and flourished, like some vigorous shoot, at the court of the Thracian, my father's friend. But when Troy fell and Hector lost his life and my father's hearth was rooted up, and himself fell butchered at the god-built altar by the hands of Achilles' murderous son; then did my father's friend slay me his helpless guest for the sake of the gold, and thereafter cast me into the swell of the sea, to keep the gold for himself in his house. And there I lie one time upon the strand, another in the salt sea's surge, drifting ever up and down upon the billows, unwept, unburied; but now am I hovering o'er the head of my dear mother Hecuba, a disembodied spirit, keeping my airy station these three days, ever since my poor mother came from Troy to linger here in Chersonese. Meantime all the Achaeans sit idly here in their ships at the shores of Thrace; for the son of Peleus, even Achilles, appeared above his tomb and stayed the whole host of Hellas, as they were making straight for home across the sea, demanding to have my sister Polyxena offered at his tomb, and to receive his guerdon. And he will obtain this

prize, nor will they that are his friends refuse the gift; and on this very day is fate leading my sister to her doom. So will my mother see two children dead at once, me and that ill-fated maid. For I, to win a grave, ah me! will appear amid the rippling waves before her bond-maid's feet. Yes! I have won this boon from the powers below, that I should find a tomb and fall into my mother's hands; so shall I get my heart's desire; wherefore I will go and waylay aged Hecuba, for yonder she passeth on her way from the shelter of Agamemnon's tent, terrified at my spectre. Woe is thee! ah, mother mine! from a palace dragged to face a life of slavery! how sad thy lot, as sad as once 'twas blest! Some god is now destroying thee, setting this in the balance to outweigh thy former bliss.

(*The* GHOST *vanishes.* HECUBA *enters from the tent of* AGAMEMNON, *supported by her attendants, captive Trojan women.*)

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Guide these aged steps, my servants, forth before the house; support your fellow-slave, your queen of yore, ye maids of Troy. Take hold upon my aged hand, support me, guide me, lift me up; and I will lean upon your bended arm as on a staff and quicken my halting footsteps onwards. O dazzling light of Zeus! O gloom of night! why am I thus scared by fearful visions of the night? O earth, dread queen, mother of dreams that flit on sable wings! I am seeking to avert the vision of the night, the sight of horror which I saw so clearly in my dreams touching my son, who is safe in Thrace, and Polyxena my daughter dear. Ye gods of this land! preserve my son, the last and only anchor of my house, now settled in Thrace, the land of snow, safe in the keeping of his father's friend. Some fresh disaster is in store, a new strain of sorrow will be added to our woe. Such ceaseless thrills of terror never wrung my heart before. Oh! where, ye Trojan maidens, can I find inspired Helenus or Cassandra, that they may read me my dream? For I saw a dappled hind mangled by a wolf's bloody fangs, torn from my knees by force in piteous wise. And this too filled me with affright; o'er the summit of his tomb appeared Achilles' phantom, and for his guerdon he would have one of the luckless maids of Troy. Wherefore, I implore you, powers divine, avert this horror from my daughter, from my child.

(*The* CHORUS OF CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Hecuba, I have hastened away to thee, leaving my master's tent, where the lot assigned me as his appointed slave, in the day that I was driven from the city of Ilium, hunted by Achaeans thence at the

point of the spear; no alleviation bring I for thy sufferings; nay, I have laden myself with heavy news, and am a herald of sorrow to thee, lady. 'Tis said the Achaeans have determined in full assembly to offer thy daughter in sacrifice to Achilles; for thou knowest how one day he appeared standing on his tomb in golden harness, and stayed the sea-borne barques, though they had their sails already hoisted, with this pealing cry, "Whither away so fast, ye Danai, leaving my tomb without its prize?" Thereon arose a violent dispute with stormy altercation, and opinion was divided in the warrior host of Hellas, some being in favour of offering the sacrifice at the tomb, others dissenting. There was Agamemnon, all eagerness in thy interest, because of his love for the frenzied prophetess; but the two sons of Theseus, scions of Athens, though supporting different proposals, yet agreed on the same decision, which was to crown Achilles' tomb with fresh-spilt blood; for they said they never would set Cassandra's love before Achilles' valour. Now the zeal of the rival disputants was almost equal, until that shifty, smooth-mouthed varlet, the son of Laertes, whose tongue is ever at the service of the mob, persuaded the army not to put aside the best of all the Danai for want of a bond-maid's sacrifice, nor have it said by any of the dead that stand beside Persephone, "The Danai have left the plains of Troy without one thought of gratitude for their brethren who died for Hellas." Odysseus will be here in an instant, to drag the tender maiden from thy breast and tear her from thy aged arms. To the temples, to the altars with thee! at Agamemnon's knees throw thyself as a suppliant! Invoke alike the gods in heaven and those beneath the earth. For either shall thy prayers avail to spare thee the loss of thy unhappy child, or thou must live to see thy daughter fall before the tomb, her crimson blood spurting in deep dark jets from her neck with gold encircled.

(*The following lines between* HECUBA *and* POLYXENA *are chanted responsively.*)

HECUBA

Woe, woe is me! What words, or cries, or lamentations can I utter? Ah me! for the sorrows of my closing years! for slavery too cruel to brook or bear! Woe, woe is me! What champion have I? Sons, and city—where are they? Aged Priam is no more; no more my children now. Which way am I to go, or this or that? Whither shall I turn my steps? Where is any god or power divine to succour me? Ah, Trojan maids! bringers of evil tidings! messengers of woe! ye have made an end, an utter end of me; life on earth has no more charm for me. Ah! luckless steps, lead on, guide your aged mistress to yon tent.

(*calling*) My child, come forth; come forth, thou daughter of the queen of sorrows; listen to thy mother's voice, my child, that thou mayst know the hideous rumour I now hear about thy life.

(POLYXENA *enters from the tent.*)

POLYXENA

O mother, mother mine! why dost thou call so loud? what news is it thou hast proclaimed, scaring me, like a cowering bird, from my chamber by this alarm?

HECUBA

Alas, my daughter!

POLYXENA

Why this ominous address? it bodeth sorrow for me.

HECUBA

Woe for thy life!

POLYXENA

Tell all, hide it no longer. Ah mother! how I dread, ay dread the import of thy loud laments.

HECUBA

Ah my daughter! a luckless mother's child!

POLYXENA

Why dost thou tell me this?

HECUBA

The Argives with one consent are eager for thy sacrifice to the son of Peleus at his tomb.

POLYXENA

Ah! mother mine! how canst thou speak of such a horror? Yet tell me all, yes all, O mother dear!

HECUBA

'Tis a rumour ill-boding I tell, my child; they bring me word that sentence is passed upon thy life by the Argives' vote.

POLYXENA

Alas, for thy cruel sufferings! my persecuted mother! woe for thy life of grief! What grievous outrage some fiend hath sent on thee, hateful, horrible! No more shall I thy daughter share thy bondage, hapless youth on hapless age attending. For thou, alas! wilt see thy hapless child torn from thy arms, as a calf of the hills is torn from

its mother, and sent beneath the darkness of the earth with severed throat for Hades, where with the dead shall I be laid, ah me! For thee I weep with plaintive wail, mother doomed to a life of sorrow! for my own life, its ruin and its outrage, never a tear I shed; nay, death is become to me a happier lot than life.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

See where Odysseus comes in haste, to announce some fresh command to thee, Hecuba.

(ODYSSEUS *enters, with his attendants.*)

ODYSSEUS

Lady, methinks thou knowest already the intention of the host, and the vote that has been passed; still will I declare it. It is the Achaeans' will to sacrifice thy daughter Polyxena at the mound heaped o'er Achilles' grave; and they appoint me to take the maid and bring her thither, while the son of Achilles is chosen to preside o'er the sacrifice and act as priest. Dost know then what to do? Be not forcibly torn from her, nor match thy might 'gainst mine; recognize the limits of thy strength, and the presence of thy troubles. Even in adversity 'tis wise to yield to reason's dictates.

HECUBA

Ah me! an awful trial is nigh, it seems, fraught with mourning, rich in tears. Yes, I too escaped death where death had been my due, and Zeus destroyed me not but is still preserving my life, that I may witness in my misery fresh sorrows surpassing all before. Still if the bond may ask the free of things that grieve them not nor wrench their heart-strings, 'tis well that thou shouldst make an end and hearken to my questioning.

ODYSSEUS

Granted; put thy questions; that short delay I grudge thee not.

HECUBA

Dost remember the day thou camest to spy on Ilium, disguised in rags and tatters, while down thy cheek ran drops of blood? [1]

ODYSSEUS

Remember it! yes; 'twas no slight impression it made upon my heart.

HECUBA

Did Helen recognize thee and tell me only?

ODYSSEUS

I well remember the awful risk I ran.

HECUBA

Didst thou embrace my knees in all humility?

ODYSSEUS

Yea, so that my hand grew dead and cold upon thy robe.

HECUBA

What saidst thou then, when in my power?

ODYSSEUS

Doubtless I found plenty to say, to save my life.

HECUBA

Was it I that saved and sent thee forth again?

ODYSSEUS

Thou didst, and so I still behold the light of day.

HECUBA

Art not thou then playing a sorry part to plot against me thus, after the kind treatment thou didst by thy own confession receive from me, showing me no gratitude but all the ill thou canst? A thankless race! all ye who covet honour from the mob for your oratory. Oh that ye were unknown to me! ye who harm your friends and think no more of it, if ye can but say a word to win the mob. But tell me, what kind of cleverness did they think it, when against this child they passed their bloody vote? Was it duty led them to slay a human victim at the tomb, where sacrifice of oxen more befits? or does Achilles, if claiming the lives of those who slew him as his recompense, show his justice by marking her out for death? No! she at least ne'er injured him. He should have demanded Helen as a victim at his tomb, for she it was that proved his ruin, bringing him to Troy; or if some captive of surpassing beauty was to be singled out for doom, this pointed not to us; for the daughter of Tyndareus was fairer than all womankind, and her injury to him was proved no less than ours. Against the justice of his plea I pit this argument. Now hear the recompense due from thee to me at my request. On thy own confession, thou didst fall at my feet and embrace my hand and aged cheek; I in my turn now do the same to thee, and claim the favour then bestowed; and I implore thee, tear not my child from my arms, nor slay her. There be dead enough; she is my only joy, in her I forget my sorrows; my one comfort she in place of many a loss, my city and my nurse, my staff and journey's guide. 'Tis never right that those in power should use it out of season, or when prosperous suppose they will be always so. For I like them was prosperous once, but now my life is lived, and one day robbed me of all my bliss. Friend, by thy beard, have some regard and pity for me;

go to Achaea's host, and talk them over, saying how hateful a thing it is to slay women whom at first ye spared out of pity, after dragging them from the altars. For amongst you the self-same law holds good for bond and free alike respecting bloodshed; such influence as thine will persuade them even though thy words are weak; for the same argument, when proceeding from those of no account, has not the same force as when it is uttered by men of mark.

LEADER

Human nature is not so stony-hearted as to hear thy plaintive tale and catalogue of sorrows, without shedding a tear.

ODYSSEUS

O Hecuba! be schooled by me, nor in thy passion count him a foe who speaketh wisely. Thy life I am prepared to save, for the service I received; I say no otherwise. But what I said to all, I will not now deny, that after Troy's capture I would give thy daughter to the chiefest of our host because he asked a victim. For herein is a source of weakness to most states, whene'er a man of brave and generous soul receives no greater honour than his inferiors. Now Achilles, lady, deserves honour at our hands, since for Hellas he died as nobly as a mortal can. Is not this a foul reproach to treat a man as a friend in life, but, when he is gone from us, to treat him so no more? How now? what will they say, if once more there comes a gathering of the host and a contest with the foe? "Shall we fight or nurse our lives, seeing the dead have no honours?" For myself, indeed, though in life my daily store were scant, yet would it be all-sufficient, but as touching a tomb I should wish mine to be an object of respect, for this gratitude has long to run. Thou speakest of cruel sufferings; hear my answer. Amongst us are aged dames and grey old men no less miserable than thou, and brides of gallant husbands reft, o'er whom this Trojan dust has closed. Endure these sorrows; for us, if we are wrong in resolving to honour the brave, we shall bring upon ourselves a charge of ignorance; but as for you barbarians, regard not your friends as such and pay no homage to your gallant dead, that Hellas may prosper and ye may reap the fruits of such policy.

LEADER

Alas! how cursed is slavery alway in its nature, forced by the might of the stronger to endure unseemly treatment.

HECUBA

Daughter, my pleading to avert thy bloody death was wasted idly on the air; do thou, if in aught endowed with greater power to move than thy mother, make haste to use it, uttering every pleading note like the

tuneful nightingale, to save thy soul from death. Throw thyself at Odysseus' knees to move his pity, and try to move him. Here is thy plea: he too hath children, so that he can feel for thy sad fate.

POLYXENA

Odysseus, I see thee hiding thy right hand beneath thy robe and turning away thy face, that I may not touch thy beard. Take heart; thou art safe from the suppliant's god in my case, for I will follow thee, alike because I must and because it is my wish to die; for were I loth, a coward should I show myself, a woman faint of heart. Why should I prolong my days? I whose sire was king of all the Phrygians?—my chiefest pride in life. Then was I nursed on fair fond hopes to be a bride for kings, the centre of keen jealousy amongst suitors, to see whose home I would make my own; and o'er each dame of Ida I was queen; ah me! a maiden marked amid her fellows, equal to a goddess, save for death alone, but now a slave! That name first makes me long for death, so strange it sounds; and then maybe my lot might give me to some savage master, one that would buy me for money,—me the sister of Hector and many another chief,—who would make me knead him bread within his halls, or sweep his house or set me working at the loom, leading a life of misery; while some slave, bought I know not whence, will taint my maiden charms, once deemed worthy of royalty. No, never! Here I close my eyes upon the light, free as yet, and dedicate myself to Hades. Lead me hence, Odysseus, and do thy worst, for I see naught within my reach to make me hope or expect with any confidence that I am ever again to be happy. Mother mine! seek not to hinder me by word or deed, but join in my wish for death ere I meet with shameful treatment undeserved. For whoso is not used to taste of sorrow's cup, though he bears it, yet it galls him when he puts his neck within the yoke; far happier would he be dead than alive, for life of honour reft is toil and trouble.

LEADER

A wondrous mark, most clearly stamped, doth noble birth imprint on men, and the name goeth still further where it is deserved.

HECUBA

A noble speech, my daughter! but there is sorrow linked with its noble sentiments.

Odysseus, if ye must pleasure the son of Peleus, and avoid reproach, slay not this maid, but lead me to Achilles' pyre and torture me unsparingly; 'twas I that bore Paris, whose fatal shaft laid low the son of Thetis.

ODYSSEUS

'Tis not thy death, old dame, Achilles' wraith hath demanded of the Achaeans, but hers.

HECUBA

At least then slaughter me with my child; so shall there be a double draught of blood for the earth and the dead that claims this sacrifice.

ODYSSEUS

The maiden's death suffices; no need to add a second to the first; would we needed not e'en this!

HECUBA

Die with my daughter I must and will.

ODYSSEUS

How so? I did not know I had a master.

HECUBA

I will cling to her like ivy to an oak.

ODYSSEUS

Not if thou wilt hearken to those who are wiser than thyself.

HECUBA

Be sure I will never willingly relinquish my child.

ODYSSEUS

Well, be equally sure I will never go away and leave her here.

POLYXENA

Mother, hearken to me; and thou, son of Laertes, make allowance for a parent's natural wrath. My poor mother, fight not with our masters. Wilt thou be thrown down, be roughly thrust aside and wound thy aged skin, and in unseemly wise be torn from me by youthful arms? This wilt thou suffer; do not so, for 'tis not right for thee. Nay, dear mother mine! give me thy hand beloved, and let me press thy cheek to mine; for never, nevermore, but now for the last time shall I behold the dazzling sun-god's orb. My last farewells now take! O mother, mother mine! beneath the earth I pass.

HECUBA

O my daughter, I am still to live and be a slave.

POLYXENA

Unwedded I depart, never having tasted the married joys that were my due!

HECUBA

Thine, my daughter, is a piteous lot, and sad is mine also.

POLYXENA

There in Hades' courts shall I be laid apart from thee.

HECUBA

Ah me, what shall I do? where shall I end my life?

POLYXENA

Daughter of a free-born sire, a slave I am to die.

HECUBA

Not one of all my fifty children left!

POLYXENA

What message can I take for thee to Hector or thy aged lord?

HECUBA

Tell them that of all women I am the most miserable.

POLYXENA

Ah! bosom and breasts that fed me with sweet food!

HECUBA

Woe is thee, my child, for this untimely fate!

POLYXENA

Farewell, my mother! farewell, Cassandra!

HECUBA

"Fare well!" others do, but not thy mother, no!

POLYXENA

Thou too, my brother Polydorus, who art in Thrace, the home of steeds!

HECUBA

Aye, if he lives, which much I doubt; so luckless am I every way.

POLYXENA

Oh yes, he lives; and, when thou diest, he will close thine eyes.

HECUBA

I *am* dead; sorrow has forestalled death here.

POLYXENA

Come veil my head, Odysseus, and take me hence; for now, ere falls the fatal blow, my heart is melted by my mother's wailing, and hers no less by mine. O light of day! for still may I call thee by thy name, though now my share in thee is but the time I take to go 'twixt this and the sword at Achilles' tomb.

(ODYSSEUS *and his attendants lead* POLYXENA *away.*)

HECUBA

Woe is me! I faint; my limbs sink under me. O my daughter, embrace thy mother, stretch out thy hand, give it me again; leave me not childless! Ah, friends! 'tis my death-blow. Oh! to see that Spartan woman, Helen, sister of the sons of Zeus, in such a plight; for her bright eyes have caused the shameful fall of Troy's once prosperous town.

(HECUBA *sinks fainting to the ground.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O breeze from out the deep arising, that waftest swift galleys, ocean's coursers, across the surging main! whither wilt thou bear me the child of sorrow? To whose house shall I be brought, to be his slave and chattel? to some haven in the Dorian land, or in Phthia, where men say Apidanus, father of fairest streams, makes fat and rich the tilth?

antistrophe 1

or to an island home, sent on a voyage of misery by oars that sweep the brine, leading a wretched existence in halls where the first-created palm and the bay-tree put forth their sacred shoots for dear Latona, memorial fair of her divine travail? and there with the maids of Delos shall I hymn the golden snood and bow of Artemis their goddess?

strophe 2

Or in the city of Pallas, the home of Athena of the beauteous chariot, shall I upon her saffron robe yoke horses to the car, embroidering them on my web in brilliant varied shades, or the race of Titans, whom Zeus the son of Cronos lays to their unending sleep with bolt of flashing flame?

antistrophe 2

Woe is me for my children! woe for my ancestors, and my country which is falling in smouldering ruin 'mid the smoke, sacked by the Argive spear! while I upon a foreign shore am called a slave forsooth, leaving Asia, Europe's handmaid, and receiving in its place a deadly marriage-bower.

(*The herald,* TALTHYBIUS, *enters.*)

TALTHYBIUS

Where can I find Hecuba, who once was queen of Ilium, ye Trojan maidens?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There she lies near thee, Talthybius, stretched full length upon the ground, wrapt in her robe.

TALTHYBIUS

Great Zeus! what can I say? that thine eye is over man? or that we hold this false opinion all to no purpose, thinking there is any race of gods, when it is chance that rules the mortal sphere? Was not this the queen of wealthy Phrygia, the wife of Priam highly blest? And now her city is utterly o'erthrown by the foe, and she, a slave in her old age, her children dead, lies stretched upon the ground, soiling her hair, poor lady! in the dust. Well, well; old as I am, may death be my lot before I am caught in any foul mischance. Arise, poor queen! lift up thyself and raise that hoary head.

HECUBA (*stirring*)

Ah! who art thou that wilt not let my body rest? why disturb me in my anguish, whosoe'er thou art?

TALTHYBIUS

'Tis I, Talthybius, who am here, the minister of the Danai; Agamemnon has sent me for thee, lady.

HECUBA (*rising*)

Good friend, art come because the Achaeans are resolved to slay me too at the grave? How welcome would thy tidings be! Let us hasten and lose no time; prithee, lead the way, old sir.

TALTHYBIUS

I am come to fetch thee to bury thy daughter's corpse, lady; and those that send me are the two sons of Atreus and the Achaean host.

HECUBA

Ah! what wilt thou say? Art thou not come, as I had thought, to fetch me to my doom, but to announce ill news? Lost, lost, my child! snatched from thy mother's arms! and I am childless now, at least as touches thee; ah, woe is me!

How did ye end her life? was any mercy shown? or did ye deal ruthlessly with her as though your victim were a foe, old man? Speak, though thy words must be pain to me.

TALTHYBIUS

Lady, thou art bent on making mine a double meed of tears in pity for thy child; for now too as I tell the sad tale a tear will wet my eye, as it did at the tomb when she was dying.

All Achaea's host was gathered there in full array before the tomb to see

thy daughter offered; and the son of Achilles took Polyxena by the hand and set her on the top of the mound, while I stood near; and a chosen band of young Achaeans followed to hold thy child and prevent her struggling. Then did Achilles' son take in his hands a brimming cup of gold and poured an offering to his dead sire, making a sign to me to proclaim silence throughout the Achaean host. So I stood at his side and in their midst proclaimed, "Silence, ye Achaeans! hushed be the people all! peace! be still!" Therewith I hushed the host. Then spake he, "Son of Peleus, father mine, accept the offering I pour thee to appease thy spirit, strong to raise the dead; and come to drink the black blood of a virgin pure, which I and the host are offering thee; oh! be propitious to us; grant that we may loose our prows and the cables of our ships, and, meeting with a prosperous voyage from Ilium, all to our country come." So he; and all the army echoed his prayer. Then seizing his golden sword by the hilt he drew it from its scabbard, signing the while to the picked young Argive warriors to hold the maid. But she, when she was ware thereof, uttered her voice and said: "O Argives, who have sacked my city! of my free will I die; let none lay hand on me; for bravely will I yield my neck. Leave me free, I do beseech; so slay me, that death may find me free; for to be called a slave amongst the dead fills my royal heart with shame." Thereat the people shouted their applause, and king Agamemnon bade the young men loose the maid. So they set her free, as soon as they heard this last command from him whose might was over all. And she, hearing her captors' words took her robe and tore it open from the shoulder to the waist, displaying a breast and bosom fair as a statue's; then sinking on her knee, one word she spake more piteous than all the rest, "Young prince, if 'tis my breast thou'dst strike, lo! here it is, strike home! or if at my neck thy sword thou'lt aim, behold! that neck is bared."

Then he, half glad, half sorry in his pity for the maid, cleft with the steel the channels of her breath, and streams of blood gushed forth; but she, e'en in death's agony, took good heed to fall with maiden grace, hiding from gaze of man what modest maiden must. Soon as she had breathed her last through the fatal gash, each Argive set his hand to different tasks, some strewing leaves o'er the corpse in handfuls, others bringing pine-logs and heaping up a pyre; and he, who brought nothing, would hear from him who did such taunts as these, "Stand'st thou still, ignoble wretch, with never a robe or ornament to bring for the maiden? Wilt thou give naught to her that showed such peerless bravery and spirit?"

Such is the tale I tell about thy daughter's death, and I regard thee as blest beyond all mothers in thy noble child, yet crossed in fortune more than all.

LEADER

Upon the race of Priam and my city some fearful curse hath burst; 'tis sent by God, and we must bear it.

HECUBA

O my daughter! 'mid this crowd of sorrows I know not where to turn my gaze; for if I set myself to one, another will not give me pause; while from this again a fresh grief summons me, finding a successor to sorrow's throne. No longer now can I efface from my mind the memory of thy sufferings sufficiently to stay my tears; yet hath the story of thy noble death taken from the keenness of my grief. Is it not then strange that poor land, when blessed by heaven with a lucky year, yields a good crop, while that which is good, if robbed of needful care, bears but little increase; yet 'mongst men the knave is never other than a knave, the good man aught but good, never changing for the worse because of misfortune, but ever the same? Is then the difference due to birth or bringing up? Good training doubtless gives lessons in good conduct, and if a man have mastered this, he knows what is base by the standard of good. Random shafts of my soul's shooting these, I know.

(*To* TALTHYBIUS) Go thou and proclaim to the Argives that they touch not my daughter's body but keep the crowd away. For when a countless host is gathered, the mob knows no restraint, and the unruliness of sailors exceeds that of fire, all abstinence from evil being counted evil.

(TALTHYBIUS *goes out.*)

(*Addressing a servant*) My aged handmaid, take a pitcher and dip it in the salt sea and bring hither thereof, that I for the last time may wash my child, a virgin wife, a widowed maid, and lay her out,—as she deserves, ah! whence can I? impossible! but as best I can; and what will that be? I will collect adornment from the captives, my companions in these tents, if haply any of them escaping her master's eye have some secret store from her old home.

(*The* MAID *departs.*)

O towering halls, O home so happy once, O Priam, rich in store of fairest wealth, most blest of sires, and I no less, the grey-haired mother of thy race, how are we brought to naught, stripped of our former pride! And spite of all we vaunt ourselves, one on the riches of his house, another because he has an honoured name amongst his fellow-citizens! But these things are naught; in vain are all our thoughtful schemes, in vain our vaunting words. He is happiest who meets no sorrow in his daily walk.

(HECUBA *enters the tent.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Woe and tribulation were made my lot in life, soon as ever Paris felled his beams of pine in Ida's woods, to sail across the heaving main in quest of Helen's hand, fairest bride on whom the sun-god turns his golden eye.

antistrophe

For here beginneth trouble's cycle, and, worse than that, relentless fate; and from one man's folly came a universal curse, bringing death to the land of Simois, with trouble from an alien shore. The strife the shepherd decided on Ida 'twixt three daughters of the blessed gods,

epode

brought as its result war and bloodshed and the ruin of my home; and many a Spartan maiden too is weeping bitter tears in her halls on the banks of fair Eurotas, and many a mother whose sons are slain, is smiting her hoary head and tearing her cheeks, making her nails red in the furrowed gash.

MAID

(*entering excitedly, attended by bearers bringing in a covered corpse*)

Oh! where, ladies, is Hecuba, our queen of sorrow, who far surpasses all in tribulation, men and women both alike? None shall wrest the crown from her.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What now, thou wretched bird of boding note? Thy evil tidings never seem to rest.

MAID

'Tis to Hecuba I bring my bitter news; no easy task is it for mortal lips to speak smooth words in sorrow's hour.

LEADER

Lo! she is coming even now from the shelter of the tent, appearing just in time to hear thee speak.

(HECUBA *comes out of the tent.*)

MAID

Alas for thee! most hapless queen, ruined beyond all words of mine to tell; robbed of the light of life; of children, husband, city reft; hopelessly undone!

HECUBA

This is no news but insult; I have heard it all before. But why art thou come, bringing hither to me the corpse of Polyxena, on whose burial Achaea's host was reported to be busily engaged?

MAID (*aside*)

She little knows what I have to tell, but mourns Polyxena, not grasping her new sorrows.

HECUBA

Ah! woe is me! thou art not surely bringing hither mad Cassandra, the prophetic maid?

MAID

She lives, of whom thou speakest; but the dead thou dost not weep is here. (*Uncovering the corpse*) Mark well the body now laid bare; is not this a sight to fill thee with wonder, and upset thy hopes?

HECUBA

Ah me! 'tis the corpse of my son Polydorus I behold, whom he of Thrace was keeping safe for me in his halls. Alas! this is the end of all; my life is o'er.

(*Chanting*) O my son, my son, alas for thee! a frantic strain I now begin; thy fate I learnt, a moment gone, from some foul fiend.

MAID

What! so thou knewest thy son's fate, poor lady.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

I cannot, cannot credit this fresh sight I see. Woe succeeds to woe; time will never cease henceforth to bring me groans and tears.

LEADER

Alas! poor lady, our sufferings are cruel indeed.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

O my son, child of a luckless mother, what was the manner of thy death? what lays thee dead at my feet? Who did the deed?

MAID

I know not. On the sea-shore I found him.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Cast up on the smooth sand, or thrown there after the murderous blow?

MAID

The waves had washed him ashore.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Alas! alas! I read aright the vision I saw in my sleep, nor did the phantom dusky-winged escape my ken, even the vision I saw concerning my son, who is now no more within the bright sunshine.

LEADER

Who slew him then? Can thy dream-lore tell us that?

HECUBA (*chanting*)

'Twas my own, own friend, the knight of Thrace, with whom his aged sire had placed the boy in hiding.

LEADER

O horror! what wilt thou say? did he slay him to get the gold?

HECUBA (*chanting*)

O awful crime! O deed without a name! beggaring wonder! impious! intolerable! Where are now the laws 'twixt guest and host? Accursed monster! how hast thou mangled his flesh, slashing the poor child's limbs with ruthless sword, lost to all sense of pity!

LEADER

Alas for thee! how some deity, whose hand is heavy on thee, hath sent thee troubles beyond all other mortals! But yonder I see our lord and master Agamemnon coming; so let us be still henceforth, my friends.

(AGAMEMNON *enters.*)

AGAMEMNON

Hecuba, why art thou delaying to come and bury thy daughter? for it was for this that Talthybius brought me thy message begging that none of the Argives should touch thy child. And so I granted this, and none is touching her, but this long delay of thine fills me with wonder. Wherefore am I come to send thee hence; for our part there is well performed; if herein there be any place for "well."

(*He sees the body.*)

Ha! what man is this I see near the tents, some Trojan's corpse? 'tis not an Argive's body; *that* the garments it is clad in tell me.

HECUBA (*aside*)

Unhappy one! in naming thee I name myself; O Hecuba, what shall I do? throw myself here at Agamemnon's knees, or bear my sorrows in silence?

AGAMEMNON

Why dost thou turn thy back towards me and weep, refusing to say what has happened, or who this is?

HECUBA (*aside*)

But should he count me as a slave and foe and spurn me from his knees, I should but add to my anguish.

AGAMEMNON

I am no prophet born; wherefore, if I be not told, I cannot learn the current of thy thoughts.

HECUBA (*aside*)

Can it be that in estimating this man's feelings I make him out too ill-disposed, when he is not really so?

AGAMEMNON

If thy wish really is that I should remain in ignorance, we are of one mind; for I have no wish myself to listen.

HECUBA (*aside*)

Without his aid I shall not be able to avenge my children. Why do I still ponder the matter? I must do and dare whether I win or lose. (*Turning to* AGAMEMNON) O Agamemnon! by thy knees, by thy beard and conquering hand I implore thee.

AGAMEMNON

What is thy desire? to be set free? that is easily done.

HECUBA

Not that; give me vengeance on the wicked, and evermore am I willing to lead a life of slavery.

AGAMEMNON

Well, but why dost thou call me to thy aid?

HECUBA

'Tis a matter thou little reckest of, O king. Dost see this corpse, for whom my tears now flow?

AGAMEMNON

I do; but what is to follow, I cannot guess.

HECUBA

He was my child in days gone by; I bore him in my womb.

AGAMEMNON
Which of thy sons is he, poor sufferer?

HECUBA
Not one of Priam's race who fell 'neath Ilium's walls.

AGAMEMNON
Hadst thou any son besides those, lady?

HECUBA
Yes, him thou seest here, of whom, methinks, I have small gain.

AGAMEMNON
Where then was he, when his city was being destroyed?

HECUBA
His father, fearful of his death, conveyed him out of Troy.

AGAMEMNON
Where did he place him apart from all the sons he then had?

HECUBA
Here in this very land, where his corpse was found.

AGAMEMNON
With Polymestor, the king of this country?

HECUBA
Hither was he sent in charge of gold, most bitter trust!

AGAMEMNON
By whom was he slain? what death o'ertook him?

HECUBA
By whom but by this man? His Thracian host slew him.

AGAMEMNON
The wretch! could he have been so eager for the treasure?

HECUBA
Even so; soon as ever he heard of the Phrygians' disaster.

AGAMEMNON
Where didst find him? or did some one bring his corpse?

HECUBA
This maid, who chanced upon it on the sea-shore.

AGAMEMNON

Was she seeking it, or bent on other tasks?

HECUBA

She had gone to fetch water from the sea to wash Polyxena.

AGAMEMNON

It seems then his host slew him and cast his body out to sea.

HECUBA

Aye, for the waves to toss, after mangling him thus.

AGAMEMNON

Woe is thee for thy measureless troubles!

HECUBA

I am ruined; no evil now is left, O Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON

Look you! what woman was ever born to such misfortune?

HECUBA

There is none, unless thou wouldst name misfortune herself. But hear my reason for throwing myself at thy knees. If my treatment seems to thee deserved, I will be content; but, if otherwise, help me to punish this most godless host, that hath wrought a deed most damned, fearless alike of gods in heaven or hell; who, though full oft he had shared my board and been counted first of all my guest-friends and after meeting with every kindness he could claim and receiving my consideration, slew my son, and bent though he was on murder, deigned not to bury him but cast his body forth to sea.

I may be a slave and weak as well, but the gods are strong, and custom too which prevails o'er them, for by custom it is that we believe in them and set up bounds of right and wrong for our lives. Now if this principle, when referred to thee, is to be set at naught, and they are to escape punishment who murder guests or dare to plunder the temples of gods, then is all fairness in things human at an end. Deem this then a disgrace and show regard for me, have pity on me, and, like an artist standing back from his picture, look on me and closely scan my piteous state. I was once a queen, but now I am thy slave; a happy mother once, but now childless and old alike, reft of city, utterly forlorn, the most wretched woman living. Ah! woe is me! whither wouldst thou withdraw thy steps from me? (*as* AGAMEMNON *is turning away*) My efforts then will be in vain, ah me! ah me! Why, oh! why do we mortals toil, as needs we must, and seek out all other sciences, but persuasion, the only real mistress of mankind,

we take no further pains to master completely by offering to pay for the knowledge, so that any man might upon occasion convince his fellows as he pleased and gain his point as well? [2] How shall anyone hereafter hope for prosperity? All those my sons are gone from me, and I, their mother, am led away into captivity to suffer shame, while yonder I see the smoke leaping up o'er my city. Further—though perhaps this were idly urged, to plead thy love, still will I put the case:—at thy side lies my daughter, Cassandra, the maid inspired, as the Phrygians call her. How then, O king, wilt thou acknowledge those nights of rapture, or what return shall she my daughter or I her mother have for all the love she has lavished on her lord? For from darkness and the endearments of the night mortals reap by far their keenest joys. Hearken then; dost see this corpse? By doing him a service thou wilt do it to a kinsman of thy bride's. One thing only have I yet to urge. Oh! would I had a voice in arms, in hands, in hair and feet, placed there by the arts of Daedalus or some god, that all together they might with tears embrace thy knees, bringing a thousand pleas to bear on thee! O my lord and master, most glorious light of Hellas, listen, stretch forth a helping hand to this aged woman, for all she is a thing of naught; still do so. For 'tis ever a good man's duty to succour the right, and to punish evil-doers wherever found.

LEADER

'Tis strange how each extreme doth meet in human life! Custom determines even our natural ties, making the most bitter foes friends, and regarding as foes those who formerly were friends.

AGAMEMNON

Hecuba, I feel compassion for thee and thy son and thy ill-fortune, as well as for thy suppliant gesture, and I would gladly see yon impious host pay thee this forfeit for the sake of heaven and justice, could I but find some way to help thee without appearing to the army to have plotted the death of the Thracian king for Cassandra's sake. For on one point I am assailed by perplexity; the army count this man their friend, the dead their foe; that he is dear to thee is a matter apart, wherein the army has no share. Reflect on this; for though thou find'st me ready to share thy toil and quick to lend my aid, yet the risk of being reproached by the Achaeans makes me hesitate.

HECUBA

Ah! there is not in the world a single man free; for he is either a slave to money or to fortune, or else the people in their thousands or the fear of public prosecution prevents him from following the dictates of his heart.

But since thou art afraid, deferring too much to the rabble, I will rid thee of that fear. Thus; be privy to my plot if I devise mischief against

this murderer, but refrain from any share in it. And if there break out among the Achaeans any uproar or attempt at rescue, when the Thracian is suffering his doom, check it, though without seeming to do so for my sake. For what remains, take heart; I will arrange everything well.

AGAMEMNON

How? what wilt thou do? wilt take a sword in thy old hand and slay the barbarian, or hast thou drugs or what to help thee? Who will take thy part? whence wilt thou procure friends?

HECUBA

Sheltered beneath these tents is a host of Trojan women.

AGAMEMNON

Dost mean the captives, the booty of the Hellenes?

HECUBA

With their help will I punish my murderous foe.

AGAMEMNON

How are women to master men?

HECUBA

Numbers are a fearful thing, and joined to craft a desperate foe.

AGAMEMNON

True; still I have a mean opinion of the female race.

HECUBA

What? did not women slay the sons of Aegyptus, and utterly clear Lemnos of men? But let it be even thus; put an end to our conference, and send this woman for me safely through the host. And do thou (*To a servant*) draw near my Thracian friend and say, "Hecuba, once queen of Ilium, summons thee, on thy own business no less than hers, thy children too, for they also must hear what she has to say." (*The servant goes out.*) Defer awhile, Agamemnon, the burial of Polyxena lately slain, that brother and sister may be laid on the same pyre and buried side by side, a double cause of sorrow to their mother.

AGAMEMNON

So shall it be; yet had the host been able to sail, I could not have granted thee this boon; but, as it is, since the god sends forth no favouring breeze, we needs must abide, seeing, as we do, that sailing cannot be. Good luck to thee! for this is the interest alike of citizen and state, that the wrong-doer be punished and the good man prosper.

(AGAMEMNON *departs as* HECUBA *withdraws into the tent.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

No more, my native Ilium, shalt thou be counted among the towns ne'er sacked; so thick a cloud of Hellene troops is settling all around, wasting thee with the spear; shorn art thou of thy coronal of towers, and fouled most piteously with filthy soot; no more, ah me! shall I tread thy streets.

antistrophe 1

'Twas in the middle of the night my ruin came, in the hour when sleep steals sweetly o'er the eyes after the feast is done. My husband, the music o'er, and the sacrifice that sets the dance afoot now ended, was lying in our bridal-chamber, his spear hung on a peg; with never a thought of the sailor-throng encamped upon the Trojan shores;

strophe 2

and I was braiding my tresses 'neath a tight-drawn snood before my golden mirror's countless rays, that I might lay me down to rest; when lo! through the city rose a din, and a cry went ringing down the streets of Troy, "Ye sons of Hellas, when, oh! when will ye sack the citadel of Ilium, and seek your homes?"

antistrophe 2

Up sprang I from my bed, with only a mantle about me, like a Dorian maid, and sought in vain, ah me! to station myself at the holy hearth of Artemis; for, after seeing my husband slain, I was hurried away o'er the broad sea; with many a backward look at my city, when the ship began her homeward voyage and parted me from Ilium's strand; till alas! for very grief I fainted,

epode

cursing Helen the sister of the Dioscuri, and Paris the baleful shepherd of Ida; for 'twas their marriage, which was no marriage but a curse by some demon sent, that robbed me of my country and drove me from my home. Oh! may the sea's salt flood ne'er carry her home again; and may she never set foot in her father's halls!

(HECUBA *comes out of the tent as* POLYMESTOR, *his children and guards enter.*)

POLYMESTOR

My dear friend Priam, and thou no less, Hecuba, I weep to see thee and thy city thus, and thy daughter lately slain. Alas! there is naught to be relied on; fair fame is insecure, nor is there any guarantee that weal will

not be turned to woe. For the gods confound our fortunes, tossing them to and fro, and introduce confusion, that our perplexity may make us worship them. But what boots it to bemoan these things, when it brings one no nearer to heading the trouble? If thou art blaming me at all for my absence, stay a moment; I was away in the very heart of Thrace when thou wast brought hither; but on my return, just as I was starting from my home for the same purpose, thy maid fell in with me, and gave me thy message, which brought me here at once.

HECUBA

Polymestor, I am holden in such wretched plight that I blush to meet thine eye; for my present evil case makes me ashamed to face thee who didst see me in happier days, and I cannot look on thee with unfaltering gaze. Do not then think it ill-will on my part, Polymestor; there is another cause as well, I mean the custom which forbids women to meet men's gaze.

POLYMESTOR

No wonder, surely. But what need hast thou of me? Why didst send for me to come hither from my house?

HECUBA

I wish to tell thee and thy children a private matter of my own; prithee, bid thy attendants withdraw from the tent.

POLYMESTOR (*to his Attendants*)

Retire; this desert spot is safe enough. (*The guards go out; to* HECUBA) Thou art my friend, and this Achaean host is well-disposed to me. But thou must tell me how prosperity is to succour its unlucky friends; for ready am I to do so.

HECUBA

First tell me of the child Polydorus, whom thou art keeping in thy halls, received from me and his father; is he yet alive? The rest will I ask thee after that.

POLYMESTOR

Yes, thou still hast a share in fortune there.

HECUBA

Well said, dear friend! how worthy of thee!

POLYMESTOR

What next wouldst learn of me?

HECUBA
Hath he any recollection of me his mother?

POLYMESTOR
Aye, he was longing to steal away hither to thee.

HECUBA
Is the gold safe, which he brought with him from Troy?

POLYMESTOR
Safe under lock and key in my halls.

HECUBA
There keep it, but covet not thy neighbour's goods.

POLYMESTOR
Not I; God grant me luck of what I have, lady!

HECUBA
Dost know what I wish to say to thee and thy children?

POLYMESTOR
Not yet; thy words maybe will declare it.

HECUBA
May it grow as dear to thee as thou now art to me!

POLYMESTOR
What is it that I and my children are to learn?

HECUBA
There be ancient vaults filled full of gold by Priam's line.

POLYMESTOR
Is it this thou wouldst tell thy son?

HECUBA
Yes, by thy lips, for thou art a righteous man.

POLYMESTOR
What need then of these children's presence?

HECUBA
'Tis better they should know it, in case of thy death.

POLYMESTOR
True; 'tis also the wiser way.

HECUBA

Well, dost thou know where stands the shrine of Trojan Athena?

POLYMESTOR

Is the gold there? what is there to mark it?

HECUBA

A black rock rising above the ground.

POLYMESTOR

Is there aught else thou wouldst tell me about the place?

HECUBA

I wish to keep safe the treasure I brought from Troy.

POLYMESTOR

Where can it be? inside thy dress, or hast thou it hidden?

HECUBA

'Tis safe amid a heap of spoils within these tents.

POLYMESTOR

Where? This is the station built by the Achaeans to surround their fleet.

HECUBA

The captive women have huts of their own.

POLYMESTOR

It is safe to enter? are there no men about?

HECUBA

There are no Achaeans within; we are alone. Enter then the tent, for the Argives are eager to set sail from Troy for home; and, when thou hast accomplished all that is appointed thee, thou shalt return with thy children to that bourn where thou hast lodged my son.

(HECUBA *leads* POLYMESTOR *and his children into the tent.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Not yet hast thou paid the penalty, but maybe thou yet wilt; like one who slips and falls into the surge with no haven near, so shalt thou lose thy own life for the life thou hast taken. For where the rights of justice and the law of heaven are one, there is ruin fraught with death and doom. Thy hopes of this journey shall cheat thee, for it hath led thee, unhappy wretch! to the halls of death; and to no warrior's hand shalt thou resign thy life.

POLYMESTOR (*within the tent*)

O horror! I am blinded of the light of my eyes, ah me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Heard ye, friends, that Thracian's cry of woe?

POLYMESTOR (*within*)

O horror! horror! my children! O the cruel blow.

LEADER

Friends, new ills are brought to pass in yonder tent.

POLYMESTOR (*within*)

Nay, ye shall never escape for all your hurried flight; for with my fist will I burst open the inmost recesses of this hall.

LEADER

Hark! how he launches ponderous blows! Shall we force an entry? The crisis calls on us to aid Hecuba and the Trojan women.

(HECUBA *enters, calling back into the tent.*)

HECUBA

Strike on, spare not, burst the doors! thou shalt ne'er replace bright vision in thy eyes nor ever see thy children, whom I have slain, alive again.

LEADER

What! hast thou foiled the Thracian, and is the stranger in thy power, mistress mine? is all thy threat now brought to pass?

HECUBA

A moment, and thou shalt see him before the tent, his eyes put out, with random step advancing as a blind man must; yea, and the bodies of his two children whom I with my brave daughters of Troy did slay; he hath paid me his forfeit; look where he cometh from the tent. I will withdraw out of his path and stand aloof from the hot fury of this Thracian, my deadly foe.

(POLYMESTOR *rushes out. Blood is streaming from his eyes.*)

POLYMESTOR (*chanting*)

Woe is me! whither can I go, where halt, or whither turn? shall I crawl upon my hands like a wild four-footed beast on their track? Which path shall I take first, this or that, eager as I am to clutch those Trojan murderesses that have destroyed me? Out upon ye, cursed daughters of Phrygia! to what corner have ye fled cowering before me? O sun-god, would thou couldst heal my bleeding orbs, ridding me of my blindness!

Ha! hush! I catch their stealthy footsteps here. Where can I dart on them and gorge me on their flesh and bones, making for myself a wild beasts' meal, exacting vengeance in requital of their outrage on me? Ah, woe is me! whither am I rushing, leaving my babes unguarded for hell-hounds to mangle, to be murdered and ruthlessly cast forth upon the hills, a feast of blood for dogs? Where shall I stay or turn my steps? where rest? like a ship that lies anchored at sea, so gathering close my linen robe I rush to that chamber of death, to guard my babes.

LEADER

Woe is thee! what grievous outrage hath been wreaked on thee! a fearful penalty for thy foul deed hath the deity imposed, whoe'er he is whose hand is heavy upon thee.

POLYMESTOR (*chanting*)

Woe is me! Ho! my Thracian spearmen, clad in mail, a race of knights whom Ares doth inspire! Ho! Achaeans! sons of Atreus ho! to you I loudly call; come hither, in God's name come! Doth any hearken, or will no man help me? Why do ye delay? Women, captive women have destroyed me. A fearful fate is mine; ah me! my hideous outrage! Whither can I turn or go? Shall I take wings and soar aloft to the mansions of the sky, where Orion and Sirius dart from their eyes a flash as of fire, or shall I, in my misery, plunge to Hades' murky flood?

LEADER

'Tis a venial sin, when a man, suffering from evils too heavy to bear, rids himself of a wretched existence.

(AGAMEMNON *and his retinue enter.*)

AGAMEMNON

Hearing a cry I am come hither; for Echo, child of the mountain-rock, hath sent her voice loud-ringing through the host, causing a tumult. Had I not known that Troy's towers were levelled by the might of Hellas, this uproar had caused no slight terror.

POLYMESTOR

Best of friends! for by thy voice I know thee, Agamemnon, dost see my piteous state?

AGAMEMNON

What! hapless Polymestor, who hath stricken thee? who hath reft thine eyes of sight, staining the pupils with blood? who hath slain these children? whoe'er he was, fierce must have been his wrath against thee and thy children.

POLYMESTOR

Hecuba, helped by the captive women, hath destroyed me; no! not destroyed, far worse than that.

AGAMEMNON (*addressing* HECUBA)

What hast thou to say? Was it thou that didst this deed, as he avers? thou, Hecuba, that hast ventured on this inconceivable daring?

POLYMESTOR

Ha! what is that? is she somewhere near? show me, tell me where, that I may grip her in my hands and rend her limb from limb, bespattering her with gore.

AGAMEMNON

Ho! madman, what wouldst thou?

POLYMESTOR

By heaven I entreat thee, let me vent on her the fury of my arm.

AGAMEMNON

Hold! banish that savage spirit from thy heart and plead thy cause, that after hearing thee and her in turn I may fairly decide what reason there is for thy present sufferings.

POLYMESTOR

I will tell my tale. There was a son of Priam, Polydorus, the youngest, a child by Hecuba, whom his father Priam sent to me from Troy to bring up in my halls, suspecting no doubt the fall of Troy. Him I slew; but hear my reason for so doing, to show how cleverly and wisely I had planned. My fear was that if that child were left to be thy enemy, he would repeople Troy and settle it afresh; and the Achaeans, knowing that a son of Priam survived, might bring another expedition against the Phrygian land and harry and lay waste these plains of Thrace hereafter, for the neighbours of Troy to experience the very troubles we were lately suffering, O king. Now Hecuba, having discovered the death of her son, brought me hither on this pretext, saying she would tell me of hidden treasure stored up in Ilium by the race of Priam; and she led me apart with my children into the tent, that none but I might hear her news. So I sat me down on a couch in their midst to rest; for there were many of the Trojan maidens seated there, some on my right hand, some on my left, as it had been beside a friend; and they were praising the weaving of our Thracian handiwork, looking at this robe as they held it up to the light; meantime others examined my Thracian spear and so stripped me of the protection of both. And those that were young mothers were dandling my children in their arms, with loud admiration, as they passed them on from hand

to hand to remove them far from their father; and then after their smooth speeches (wouldst thou believe it?) in an instant snatching daggers from some secret place in their dress they stab my children; whilst others, like foes, seized me hand and foot; and if I tried to raise my head, anxious to help my babes, they would clutch me by the hair; while if I stirred my hands, I could do nothing, poor wretch! for the numbers of the women. At last they wrought a fearful deed, worse than what had gone before; for they took their brooches and stabbed the pupils of my hapless eyes, making them gush with blood, and then fled through the chambers; up I sprang like a wild beast in pursuit of the shameless murderesses, searching along each wall with hunter's care, dealing buffets, spreading ruin. This then is what I have suffered because of my zeal for thee, O Agamemnon, for slaying an enemy of thine. But to spare thee a lengthy speech; if any of the men of former times have spoken ill of women, if any doth so now, or shall do so hereafter, all this in one short sentence will I say; for neither land or sea produces a race so pestilent, as whosoever hath had to do with them knows full well.

LEADER

Curb thy bold tongue, and do not, because of thy own woes, thus embrace the whole race of women in one reproach; for though some of us, and those a numerous class, deserve to be disliked, there are others amongst us who rank naturally amongst the good.

HECUBA

Never ought words to have outweighed deeds in this world, Agamemnon. No! if a man's deeds had been good, so should his words have been; if, on the other hand, evil, his words should have betrayed their unsoundness, instead of its being possible at times to give a fair complexion to injustice. There are, 'tis true, clever persons, who have made a science of this, but their cleverness cannot last for ever; a miserable end awaits them; none ever yet escaped. This is a warning I give thee at the outset. Now will I turn to this fellow, and will give thee thy answer, thou who sayest it was to save Achaea double toil and for Agamemnon's sake that thou didst slay my son. Nay, villain, in the first place how could the barbarian race ever be friends with Hellas? Impossible, ever. Again, what interest hadst thou to further by thy zeal? was it to form some marriage, or on the score of kin, or, prithee, why? or was it likely that they would sail hither again and destroy thy country's crops? Whom dost thou expect to persuade into believing that? Wouldst thou but speak the truth, it was the gold that slew my son, and thy greedy spirit. Now tell me this; why, when Troy was victorious, when her ramparts still stood round her, when Priam was alive, and Hector's warring prospered, why didst thou

not, if thou wert really minded to do Agamemnon a service, then slay the child, for thou hadst him in thy palace 'neath thy care, or bring him with thee alive to the Argives? Instead of this, when our sun was set and the smoke of our city showed it was in the enemy's power, thou didst murder the guest who had come to thy hearth. Furthermore, to prove thy villainly, hear this; if thou wert really a friend to those Achaeans, thou shouldst have brought the gold, which thou sayst thou art keeping not for thyself but for Agamemnon, and given it to them, for they were in need and had endured a long exile from their native land. Whereas not even now canst thou bring thyself to part with it, but persistest in keeping it in thy palace. Again, hadst thou kept my son safe and sound, as thy duty was, a fair renown would have been thy reward, for it is in trouble's hour that the good most clearly show their friendship; though prosperity of itself in every case finds friends. Wert thou in need of money and he prosperous, that son of mine would have been as a mighty treasure for thee to draw upon; but now thou hast him no longer to be thy friend, and the benefit of the gold is gone from thee, thy children too are dead, and thyself art in this sorry plight.

To thee, Agamemnon, I say, if thou help this man, thou wilt show thy worthlessness; for thou wilt be serving one devoid of honour or piety, a stranger to the claims of good faith, a wicked host; while I shall say thou delightest in evil-doers, being such an one thyself; but I rail not at my masters.

LEADER

Look you! how a good cause ever affords men an opening for a good speech.

AGAMEMNON

To be judge in a stranger's troubles goes much against my grain, but still I must; yea, for to take this matter in hand and then put it from me is a shameful course. My opinion, that thou mayst know it, is that it was not for the sake of the Achaeans or me that thou didst slay thy guest, but to keep that gold in thy own house. In thy trouble thou makest a case in thy own interests. Maybe amongst you 'tis a light thing to murder guests, but with us in Hellas 'tis a disgrace. How can I escape reproach if I judge thee not guilty? I cannot do it. Nay, since thou didst dare thy horrid crime, endure as well its painful consequence.

POLYMESTOR

Woe is me! worsted by a woman and a slave, I am, it seems, to suffer by unworthy hands.

HECUBA

Is it not just for thy atrocious crime?

POLYMESTOR

Ah, my children! ah, my blinded eyes! woe is me!

HECUBA

Dost thou grieve? what of me? thinkst thou I grieve not for my son?

POLYMESTOR

Thou wicked wretch! thy delight is in mocking me.

HECUBA

I am avenged on thee; have I not cause for joy?

POLYMESTOR

The joy will soon cease, in the day when ocean's flood—

HECUBA

Shall convey me to the shores of Hellas?

POLYMESTOR

Nay, but close o'er thee when thou fallest from the masthead.

HECUBA

Who will force me to take the leap?

POLYMESTOR

Of thy own accord wilt thou climb the ship's mast.

HECUBA

With wings upon my back, or by what means?

POLYMESTOR

Thou wilt become a dog with bloodshot eyes.

HECUBA

How knowest thou of my transformation?

POLYMESTOR

Dionysus, our Thracian prophet, told me so.

HECUBA

And did he tell thee nothing of thy present trouble?

POLYMESTOR

No; else hadst thou never caught me thus by guile.

HECUBA

Shall I die or live, and so complete my life on earth?

POLYMESTOR

Die shalt thou; and to thy tomb shall be given a name—

HECUBA

Recalling my form, or what wilt thou tell me?

POLYMESTOR

"The hapless hound's grave," a mark for mariners.[3]

HECUBA

'Tis naught to me, now that thou hast paid me forfeit.

POLYMESTOR

Further, thy daughter Cassandra must die.

HECUBA

I scorn the prophecy! I give it to thee to keep for thyself.

POLYMESTOR

Her shall the wife of Agamemnon, grim keeper of his palace, slay.

HECUBA

Never may the daughter of Tyndareus do such a frantic deed!

POLYMESTOR

And she shall slay this king as well, lifting high the axe.

AGAMEMNON

Ha! sirrah, art thou mad? art so eager to find sorrow?

POLYMESTOR

Kill me, for in Argos there awaits thee a murderous bath.

AGAMEMNON

Ho! servants, hale him from my sight!

POLYMESTOR

Ha! my words gall thee?

AGAMEMNON

Stop his mouth!

POLYMESTOR

Close it now; for I have spoken.

AGAMEMNON

Haste and cast him upon some desert island, since his mouth is full of such exceeding presumption. Go thou, unhappy Hecuba, and bury thy two corpses; and you, Trojan women, to your masters' tents repair, for lo! I perceive a breeze just rising to waft us home. God grant we reach our country and find all well at home, released from troubles here!

(POLYMESTOR *is dragged away by* AGAMEMNON'S *guards.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Away to the harbour and the tents, my friends, to prove the toils of slavery! for such is fate's relentless hest.

NOTES FOR HECUBA

THE translation of Coleridge has been slightly modified in the following lines: 193, 424, 608, 614, 710, 874, 901, 903, 1028, 1038, 1040, 1113, 1137, 1146, 1237.

1. This episode is in part recorded in Homer's *Odyssey*, IV, 240 ff.

2. These lines reflect the growing importance of rhetoric in Athens at the time when the *Hecuba* was first produced. Plato, although he was writing somewhat later, has much to say of the "art of persuasion."

3. The transformation and death of Hecuba were traditionally connected with the name of a promontory in the Thracian Chersonese, Cynossema.

V

ANDROMACHE

Characters in the Play

Andromache
Maid of Andromache
Chorus of Phthian Women
Hermione, *daughter of* Menelaus *and wife of Neoptolemus*
Menelaus, *King of Sparta*
Molossus, *son of* Andromache *and Neoptolemus*
Peleus, *father of Achilles*
Nurse of Hermione
Orestes, *son of Agamemnon*
Messenger
Thetis, *the goddess, wife of* Peleus
Various attendants

INTRODUCTION

THE *Andromache* has never ranked high among Euripides' tragedies. It was written and produced probably in the early years of the Peloponnesian War, but unfortunately we do not possess the requisite information to date it more precisely. We do know, however, that it was presented for the first time not at Athens, but in one of the dramatic contests held in some rural district. The plot is focussed upon the fortunes of Andromache, the widow of Hector, but now the slave and concubine of Achilles' son, Neoptolemus. In the prologue, composed in the customary Euripidean fashion, Andromache herself explains her situation—that after Troy's destruction she became the captive of Neoptolemus, that she has borne him a son, and that she is hated by Hermione, whom her master has recently married. It is regrettable that Euripides has not concentrated his attention upon a study of this domestic situation and its implications, but rather has tended to emphasize the plot, which, though it contains tense moments, is unconvincingly developed through too frequent use of timely but ill-motivated entrances of new characters.

Structurally the play seems to fall into two parts which are but remotely connected with one another. The first section, wherein the proud Hermione and her villainous father, Menelaus, are on the point of killing Andromache and her son, seems to end satisfactorily, if somewhat melodramatically, when the aged Peleus comes to the rescue. But the play goes on to present Hermione in hysterical remorse, Orestes coming to take Hermione away, since he has already planned her husband's murder, Peleus bearing the undeserved brunt of the "tragedy" when Neoptolemus' body is brought in, and the final adjustment of the situation when the goddess Thetis appears. The poet loses sight of Andromache and the play loses its unity accordingly.

Menelaus as a character is interesting. He embodies all the most detestable Spartan characteristics which were rousing the hatred of the Athenians during these early days of the war. In fact, the contemporary situation of Athens in its conflict with Sparta seems to have been prominent in the poet's mind as he wrote. The portrayal of Andromache is likewise not without its power, but the treatment of character throughout

seems to suffer because Euripides uses too often the somewhat artificial technique of formal debate between the persons of his play. However, despite defects in structure and portrayal of character, and despite its failure to achieve a universality necessary to tragedy, the play is notable for passages where Euripidean pathos is at its best. Andromache and her son as they face their doom will always stir emotional depths. Any play which contains such scenes as this will command its fair due of respect from the discriminating critic.

ANDROMACHE

(SCENE:—*Before the temple of* THETIS *in Thessaly.* ANDROMACHE, *dressed as a suppliant, is clinging to the altar in front of the temple. The palace of Achilles is nearby.*)

ANDROMACHE

O CITY of Thebes, glory of Asia, whence on a day I came to Priam's princely home with many a rich and costly thing in my dower, affianced unto Hector to be the mother of his children, I Andromache, envied name in days of yore, but now of all women that have been or yet shall be the most unfortunate; for I have lived to see my husband Hector slain by Achilles, and the babe Astyanax, whom I bore my lord, hurled from the towering battlements, when the Hellenes sacked our Trojan home; and I myself am come to Hellas as a slave, though I was esteemed a daughter of a race most free, given to Neoptolemus that island-prince, and set apart for him as his special prize from the spoils of Troy. And here I dwell upon the boundaries of Phthia and Pharsalia's town, where Thetis erst, the goddess of the sea, abode with Peleus apart from the world, avoiding the throng of men; wherefore the folk of Thessaly call it the sacred place of Thetis, in honour of the goddess's marriage. Here dwells the son of Achilles and suffers Peleus still to rule Pharsalia, not wishing to assume the sceptre while the old man lives. Within these halls have I borne a boy to the son of Achilles, my master. Now aforetime for all my misery I ever had a hope to lead me on, that, if my child were safe, I might find some help and protection from my woes; but since my lord in scorn of his bondmaid's charms hath wedded that Spartan Hermione, I am tormented by her most cruelly; for she saith that I by secret enchantment am making her barren and distasteful to her husband, and that I design to take her place in this house, ousting her the rightful mistress by force; whereas I at first submitted against my will and now have resigned my place; be almighty Zeus my witness that it was not of my own free will I became her rival!

But I cannot convince her, and she longs to kill me, and her father

Menelaus is an accomplice in this. E'en now is he within, arrived from Sparta for this very purpose, while I in terror am come to take up a position here in the shrine of Thetis adjoining the house, if haply it may save me from death; for Peleus and his descendants hold it in honour as a symbol of his marriage with the Nereid. My only son am I secretly conveying to a neighbour's house in fear for his life. For his sire stands not by my side to lend his aid and cannot avail his child at all, being absent in the land of Delphi, where he is offering recompense to Loxias for the madness he committed, when on a day he went to Pytho and demanded of Phoebus satisfaction for his father's death,[1] if haply his prayer might avert those past sins and win for him the god's goodwill hereafter.

(*The* MAID OF ANDROMACHE *enters.*)

MAID

Mistress mine, be sure I do not hesitate to call thee by that name, seeing that I thought it thy right in thine own house also, when we dwelt in Troy-land; as I was ever thy friend and thy husband's while yet he was alive, so now have I come with strange tidings, in terror lest any of our masters learn hereof but still out of pity for thee; for Menelaus and his daughter are forming dire plots against thee, whereof thou must beware.

ANDROMACHE

Ah! kind companion of my bondage, for such thou art to her, who, erst thy queen, is now sunk in misery; what are they doing? What new schemes are they devising in their eagerness to take away my wretched life?

MAID

Alas! poor lady, they intend to slay thy son, whom thou hast privily conveyed from out the house.

ANDROMACHE

Ah me! Has she heard that my babe was put out of her reach? Who told her? Woe is me! how utterly undone!

MAID

I know not, but thus much of their schemes I heard myself; and Menelaus has left the house to fetch him.

ANDROMACHE

Then am I lost; ah, my child! those vultures twain will take and slay thee; while he who is called thy father lingers still in Delphi.

MAID

True, for had he been here thou wouldst not have fared so hardly, I am sure; but, as it is, thou art friendless.

ANDROMACHE

Have no tidings come that Peleus may arrive?

MAID

He is too old to help thee if he came.

ANDROMACHE

And yet I sent for him more than once.

MAID

Surely thou dost not suppose that any of thy messengers heed thee?

ANDROMACHE

Why should they? Wilt thou then go for me?

MAID

How shall I explain my long absence from the house?

ANDROMACHE

Thou art a woman; thou canst invent a hundred ways.

MAID

There is a risk, for Hermione keeps no careless guard.

ANDROMACHE

Dost look to that? Thou art disowning thy friends in distress.

MAID

Not so; never taunt me with that. I will go, for of a truth a woman and a slave is not of much account, e'en if aught befall me.

(*The* MAID *withdraws.*)

ANDROMACHE

Go then, while I will tell to heaven the lengthy tale of lamentation, mourning, and weeping, that has ever been my hard lot; for 'tis woman's way to delight in present misfortunes even to keeping them always on her tongue and lips. But I have many reasons, not merely one for tears,—my city's fall, my Hector's death, the hardness of the lot to which I am bound, since I fell on slavery's evil days undeservedly. 'Tis never right to call a son of man happy, till thou hast seen his end, to judge from the way he passes it how he will descend to that other world.

(*She begins to chant.*)

'Twas no bride Paris took with him to the towers of Ilium, but a curse to his bed when he brought Helen to her bower. For her sake, O Troy, did eager warriors, sailing from Hellas in a thousand ships, capture and make thee a prey to fire and sword; and the son of sea-born Thetis mounted on his chariot dragged my husband Hector

round the walls, ah woe is me! while I was hurried from my chamber to the beach, with slavery's hateful pall upon me. And many a tear I shed as I left my city, my bridal bower, and my husband in the dust. Woe, woe is me! why should I prolong my life, to serve Hermione? Her cruelty it is that drives me hither to the image of the goddess to throw my suppliant arms about it, melting to tears as doth a spring that gushes from the rock.

(*The* CHORUS OF PHTHIAN WOMEN *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Lady, thus keeping thy weary station without pause upon the floor of Thetis' shrine, Phthian though I am, to thee a daughter of Asia I come, to see if I can devise some remedy for these perplexing troubles, which have involved thee and Hermione in fell discord, because to thy sorrow thou sharest with her the love of Achilles' son.

antistrophe 1

Recognize thy position, weigh the present evil into the which thou art come. Thou art a Trojan captive; thy rival is thy mistress, a true-born daughter of Sparta. Leave then this home of sacrifice, the shrine of our sea-goddess. How can it avail thee to waste thy comeliness and disfigure it by weeping by reason of a mistress's harsh usage? Might will prevail against thee; why vainly toil in thy feebleness?

strophe 2

Come, quit the bright sanctuary of the Nereid divine. Recognize that thou art in bondage on a foreign soil, in a strange city, where thou seest none of all thy friends, luckless lady, cast on evil days.

antistrophe 2

Yea, I did pity thee most truly, Trojan dame, when thou camest to this house; but from fear of my mistress I hold my peace, albeit I sympathize with thee, lest she, whom Zeus's daughter bore, discover my good will toward thee.

(HERMIONE *enters, in complete royal regalia.*)

HERMIONE

With a crown of golden workmanship upon my head and about my body this embroidered robe am I come hither; no presents these I wear from the palace of Achilles or Peleus, but gifts my father Menelaus gave me together with a sumptuous dower from Sparta in Laconia, to insure me freedom of speech. Such is my answer to you (*to the* CHORUS); but as

for thee, slave and captive, thou wouldst fain oust me and secure this palace for thyself, and thanks to thy enchantment I am hated by my husband; thou it is that hast made my womb barren and cheated my hopes; for Asia's daughters have clever heads for such villainy; yet will I check thee therefrom, nor shall this temple of the Nereid avail thee aught, no! neither its altar or shrine, but thou shalt die. But if or god or man should haply wish to save thee, thou must atone for thy proud thoughts of happier days now past by humbling thyself and crouching prostrate at my knees, by sweeping out my halls, and by learning, as thou sprinklest water from a golden ewer, where thou now art. Here is no Hector, no Priam with his gold, but a city of Hellas. Yet thou, miserable woman, hast gone so far in wantonness that thou canst lay thee down with the son of the very man that slew thy husband, and bear children to the murderer. Such is all the race of barbarians; father and daughter, mother and son, sister and brother mate together; the nearest and dearest stain their path with each other's blood, and no law restrains such horrors. Bring not these crimes amongst us, for here we count it shame that one man should have the control of two wives, and men are content to turn to one lawful love, that is, all who care to live an honourable life.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Women are by nature somewhat jealous, and do ever show the keenest hate to rivals in their love.

ANDROMACHE

Ah! well-a-day! Youth is a bane to mortals, in every case, that is, where a man embraces injustice in his early days. Now I am afraid that my being a slave will prevent thee listening to me in spite of many a just plea, or if I win my case, I fear I may be damaged on this very ground, for the high and mighty cannot brook refuting arguments from their inferiors; still I will not be convicted of betraying my own cause. Tell me, proud young wife, what assurance can make me confident of wresting from thee thy lawful lord? Is it that Laconia's capital yields to Phrygia? is it that my fortune outstrips thine? or that in me thou seest a free woman? Am I so elated by my youth, my full healthy figure, the extent of my city, the number of my friends that I wish to supplant thee in thy home? Is my purpose to take thy place and rear myself a race of slaves, mere appendages to my misery? or, supposing thou bear no children, will any one endure that sons of mine should rule o'er Phthia? Ah no! there is the love that Hellas bears me, both for Hector's sake and for my own humble rank forsooth, that never knew a queen's estate in Troy. 'Tis not my sorcery that makes thy husband hate thee, nay, but thy own failure to prove thyself his help-meet. Herein lies love's only charm; 'tis not beauty, lady, but virtuous acts that win our husbands' hearts. And

though it gall thee to be told so, albeit thy city in Laconia is no doubt a mighty fact, yet thou findest no place for his Scyros, displaying wealth 'midst poverty and setting Menelaus above Achilles: and that is what alienates thy lord. Take heed; for a woman, though bestowed upon a worthless husband, must be with him content, and ne'er advance presumptuous claims. Suppose thou hadst wedded a prince of Thrace, the land of flood and melting snow, where one lord shares his affections with a host of wives, wouldst thou have slain them? If so, thou wouldst have set a stigma of insatiate lust on all our sex. A shameful charge! And yet herein we suffer more than men, though we make a good stand against it. Ah! my dear lord Hector, for thy sake would I e'en brook a rival, if ever Cypris led thee astray, and oft in days gone by I held thy bastard babes to my own breast, to spare thee any cause for grief. By this course I bound my husband to me by virtue's chains, whereas thou wilt never so much as let the drops of dew from heaven above settle on thy lord, in thy jealous fear. Oh! seek not to surpass thy mother in hankering after men, for 'tis well that all wise children should avoid the habits of such evil mothers.

LEADER

Mistress mine, be persuaded to come to terms with her, as far as readily comes within thy power.

HERMIONE

Why this haughty tone, this bandying of words, as if, forsooth, thou, not I, wert the virtuous wife?

ANDROMACHE

Thy present claims at any rate give thee small title thereto.

HERMIONE

Woman, may my bosom never harbour such ideas as thine!

ANDROMACHE

Thou art young to speak on such a theme as this.

HERMIONE

As for thee, thou dost not speak thereof, but, as thou canst, dost put it into action against me.

ANDROMACHE

Canst thou not conceal thy pangs of jealousy?

HERMIONE

What! doth not every woman put this first of all?

ANDROMACHE

Yes, if her experiences are happy; otherwise, there is no honour in speaking of them.

HERMIONE

Barbarians' laws are not a standard for our city.

ANDROMACHE

Alike in Asia and in Hellas infamy attends base actions.

HERMIONE

Clever, clever quibbler! yet die thou must and shalt.

ANDROMACHE

Dost see the image of Thetis with her eye upon thee?

HERMIONE

A bitter foe to thy country because of the death of Achilles.

ANDROMACHE

'Twas not I that slew him, but Helen that mother of thine.

HERMIONE

Pray, is it thy intention to probe my wounds yet deeper?

ANDROMACHE

Behold, I am dumb, my lips are closed.

HERMIONE

Tell me that which was my only reason for coming hither.

ANDROMACHE

No! all I tell thee is, thou hast less wisdom than thou needest.

HERMIONE

Wilt thou leave these hallowed precincts of the sea-goddess?

ANDROMACHE

Yes, if I am not to die for it; otherwise, I never will.

HERMIONE

Since that is thy resolve, I shall not even wait my lord's return.

ANDROMACHE

Nor yet will I, at any rate ere that, surrender to thee.

HERMIONE

I will bring fire to bear on thee, and pay no heed to thy entreaties

ANDROMACHE

Kindle thy blaze then; the gods will witness it.

HERMIONE

And make thy flesh to writhe by cruel wounds.

ANDROMACHE

Begin thy butchery, stain the altar of the goddess with blood, for she will visit thy iniquity.

HERMIONE

Barbarian creature, hardened in impudence, wilt thou brave death itself? Still will I find speedy means to make these quit this seat of thy free will; such a bait have I to lure thee with. But I will hide my meaning, which the event itself shall soon declare. Yes, keep thy seat, for I will make thee rise, though molten lead is holding thee there, before Achilles' son, thy trusted champion, arrive.

(HERMIONE *departs.*)

ANDROMACHE

My trusted champion, yes! how strange it is, that though some god hath devised cures for mortals against the venom of reptiles, no man ever yet hath discovered aught to cure a woman's venom, which is far worse than viper's sting or scorching flame; so terrible a curse are we to mankind.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Ah! what sorrows did the son of Zeus and Maia herald, in the day he came to Ida's glen, guiding that fair young trio of goddesses, all girded for the fray in bitter rivalry about their beauty, to the shepherd's fold where dwelt the youthful herdsman all alone by the hearth of his lonely hut.

antistrophe 1

Soon as they reached the wooded glen, in gushing mountain springs they bathed their dazzling skin, then sought the son of Priam, comparing their rival charms in more than rancorous phrase. But Cypris won the day by her deceitful promises, sweet-sounding words, but fraught with ruthless overthrow to Phrygia's hapless town and Ilium's towers.

strophe 2

Would God his mother had smitten him a cruel death-blow on the head before he made his home on Ida's slopes, in the hour Cassandra,

standing by the holy bay-tree, cried out, "Slay him, for he will bring most grievous bane on Priam's town." To every prince she went, to every elder sued for the babe's destruction.

antistrophe 2

Ah! had they listened, Ilium's daughters ne'er had felt the yoke of slavery, and thou, lady, hadst been established in the royal palace; and Hellas had been freed of all the anguish she suffered during those ten long years her sons went wandering, spear in hand, around the walls of Troy; brides had never been left desolate, nor hoary fathers childless.

(MENELAUS *and his retinue enter. He is leading* MOLOSSUS *by the hand.*)

MENELAUS

Behold I bring thy son with me, whom thou didst steal away to a neighbour's house without my daughter's knowledge. Thou wert so sure this image of the goddess would protect thee and those who hid him, but thou hast not proved clever enough for Menelaus. And so if thou refuse to leave thy station here, he shall be slain instead of thee. Wherefore weigh it well: wilt die thyself, or see him slain for the sin whereof thou art guilty against me and my daughter?

ANDROMACHE

O fame, fame! full many a man ere now of no account hast thou to high estate exalted. Those, indeed, who truly have a fair repute, I count blest; but those who get it by false pretences, I will never allow have aught but the accidental appearance of wisdom. Thou for instance, caitiff that thou art, didst thou ever wrest Troy from Priam with thy picked troops of Hellenes? thou that hast raised such a storm, at the word of thy daughter, a mere child, and hast entered the lists with a poor captive; unworthy I count thee of Troy's capture, and Troy still more disgraced by thy victory. Those who only in appearance are men of sense make an outward show, but inwardly resemble the common herd, save it be in wealth, which is their chiefest strength.

Come now, Menelaus, let us carry through this argument. Suppose I am slain by thy daughter, and she work her will on me, yet can she never escape the pollution of murder, and public opinion will make thee too an accomplice in this deed of blood, for thy share in the business must needs implicate thee. But even supposing I escape death myself, will ye kill my child? Even then, how will his father brook the murder of his child? Troy has no such coward's tale to tell of him; nay, he will follow duty's call; his actions will prove him a worthy scion of Peleus and Achilles.

Thy daughter will be thrust forth from his house; and what wilt thou say when seeking to betroth her to another? wilt say her virtue made her leave a worthless lord? Nay, that will be false. Who then will wed her? wilt thou keep her without a husband in thy halls, grown grey in widowhood? Unhappy wretch! dost not see the flood-gates of trouble opening wide for thee? How many a wrong against a wife wouldst thou prefer thy daughter to have found to suffering what I now describe? We ought not on trifling grounds to promote great ills; nor should men, if we women are so deadly a curse, bring their nature down to our level. No! if, as thy daughter asserts, I am practising sorcery against her and making her barren, right willingly will I, without any crouching at altars, submit in my own person to the penalty that lies in her husband's hands, seeing that I am no less chargeable with injuring him if I make him childless. This is my case; but for thee, there is one thing I fear in thy disposition; it was a quarrel for a woman that really induced thee to destroy poor Ilium's town.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thou hast said too much for a woman speaking to men; *that* discretion hath shot away its last shaft from thy soul's quiver.

MENELAUS

Women, these are petty matters, unworthy, as thou sayest, of my despotic sway, unworthy too of Hellas. Yet mark this well; his special fancy of the hour is of more moment to a man than Troy's capture. I then have set myself to help my daughter because I consider her loss of a wife's rights most grave; for whatever else a woman suffers is second to this; if she loses her husband's love she loses her life therewith. Now, as it is right Neoptolemus should rule my slaves, so my friends and I should have control of his; for friends, if they be really friends, keep nothing to themselves, but have all in common. So if I wait for the absent instead of making the best arrangement I can at once of my affairs, I show weakness, not wisdom. Arise then, leave the goddess's shrine, for by thy death this child escapeth his, whereas, if thou refuse to die, I will slay him; for one of you twain must perish.

ANDROMACHE

Ah me! 'tis a bitter lot thou art offering about my life; whether I take it or not I am equally unfortunate. Attend to me, thou who for a trifling cause art committing an awful crime. Why art thou bent on slaying me? What reason hast thou? What city have I betrayed? Which of thy children was ever slain by me? What house have I fired? I was forced to be my master's concubine; and spite of that wilt thou slay me, not him who is to blame, passing by the cause and hurrying to the inevitable result?

Ah me! my sorrows! Woe for my hapless country! How cruel my fate! Why had I to be a mother too and take upon me a double load of suffering? Yet why do I mourn the past, and o'er the present never shed a tear or compute its griefs? I that saw Hector butchered and dragged behind the chariot, and Ilium, piteous sight! one sheet of flame, while I was haled away by the hair of my head to the Argive ships in slavery, and on my arrival in Phthia was given to Hector's murderer as his mistress. What pleasure then has life for me? Whither am I to turn my gaze? to the present or the past? My babe alone was left me, the light of my life; and him these ministers of death would slay. No! they shall not, if my poor life can save him; for if he be saved, hope in him lives on, while to me 'twere shame to refuse to die for my son. Lo! here I leave the altar and give myself into your hands, to cut or stab, to bind or hang. Ah! my child, to Hades now thy mother passes to save thy dear life. Yet if thou escape thy doom, remember me, my sufferings and my death, and tell thy father how I fared, with fond caress and streaming eye and arms thrown round his neck. Ah! yes, his children are to every man as his own soul; and whoso sneers at this through inexperience, though he suffers less anguish, yet tastes the bitter in his cup of bliss.

LEADER

Thy tale with pity fills me; for every man alike, stranger though he be, feels pity for another's distress. Menelaus, 'tis thy duty to reconcile thy daughter and this captive, giving her a respite from sorrow.

MENELAUS

Ho! sirrahs, seize this woman (*His attendants swiftly carry out the order.*); hold her fast; for 'tis no welcome story she will have to hear. It was to make thee leave the holy altar of the goddess that I held thy child's death before thy eyes, and so induced thee to give thyself up to me to die. So stands thy case, be well assured; but as for this child, my daughter shall decide whether she will slay him or no. Get thee hence into the house, and there learn to bridle thy insolence in speaking to the free, slave that thou art.

ANDROMACHE

Alas! thou hast by treachery beguiled me; I was deceived.

MENELAUS

Proclaim it to the world; I do not deny it.

ANDROMACHE

Is this counted cleverness amongst you who dwell by the Eurotas?

MENELAUS

Yes, and amongst Trojans too, that those who suffer should retaliate.

ANDROMACHE

Thinkest thou God's hand is shortened, and that thou wilt not be punished?

MENELAUS

Whene'er that comes, I am ready to bear it. But thy life will I have.

ANDROMACHE

Wilt likewise slay this tender chick, whom thou hast snatched from 'neath my wing?

MENELAUS

Not I, but I will give him to my daughter to slay if she will.

ANDROMACHE

Ah me! why not begin my mourning then for thee, my child?

MENELAUS

Of a truth 'tis no very sure hope that he has left.

ANDROMACHE

O citizens of Sparta, the bane of all the race of men, schemers of guile, and masters in lying, devisers of evil plots, with crooked minds and tortuous methods and ne'er one honest thought, 'tis wrong that ye should thrive in Hellas. What crime is wanting in your list? How rife is murder with you! How covetous ye are! One word upon your lips, another in your heart, this is what men always find with you. Perdition catch ye! Still death is not so grievous, as thou thinkest, to me. No! for my life ended in the day that hapless Troy was destroyed with my lord, that glorious warrior, whose spear oft made a coward like thee quit the field and seek thy ship. But now against a woman hast thou displayed the terrors of thy panoply, my would-be murderer. Strike then! for this my tongue shall never flatter thee or that daughter of thine. For though thou wert of great account in Sparta, why so was I in Troy. And if I am now in sorry plight, presume not thou on this; thou too mayst be so yet.

(MENELAUS *and his guards lead* ANDROMACHE *out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Never, oh! never will I commend rival wives or sons of different mothers, a cause of strife, of bitterness, and grief in every house. I would have a husband content with one wife whose rights he shareth with no other.

antistrophe 1

Not even in states is dual monarchy better to bear than undivided rule; it only doubles burdens and causes faction amongst the citizens. Often too will the Muse sow strife 'twixt rivals in the art of minstrelsy.

strophe 2

Again, when strong winds are drifting mariners, the divided counsel of the wise does not best avail for steering, and their collective wisdom has less weight than the inferior mind of the single man who has sole authority; for this is the essence of power alike in house and state, whene'er men care to find the proper moment.

antistrophe 2

This Spartan, the daughter of the great chief Menelaus, proves this; for she hath kindled hot fury against a rival, and is bent on slaying the hapless Trojan maid and her child to further her bitter quarrel. 'Tis a murder gods and laws and kindness all forbid. Ah! lady, retribution for this deed will yet visit thee.

But lo! before the house I see those two united souls, condemned to die. Alas! for thee, poor lady, and for thee, unhappy child, who art dying on account of thy mother's marriage, though thou hast no share therein and canst not be blamed by the royal house.

(ANDROMACHE *enters, her arms bound. Her son clings to her.* MENELAUS *and the guards follow, intent on accomplishing the murder. The following lines are chanted responsively.*)

ANDROMACHE

Behold me journeying on the downward path, my hands so tightly bound with cords that they bleed.

MOLOSSUS

O mother, mother mine! I too share thy downward path, nestling 'neath thy wing.

ANDROMACHE

A cruel sacrifice! ye rulers of Phthia!

MOLOSSUS

Come, father! succour those thou lovest.

ANDROMACHE

Rest there, my babe, my darling! on thy mother's bosom, e'en in death and in the grave.

MOLOSSUS

Ah, woe is me! what will become of me and thee too, mother mine?

MENELAUS

Away, to the world below! from hostile towers ye came, the pair of you; two different causes necessitate your deaths; my sentence takes away thy life, and my daughter Hermione's requires his; for it would be the height of folly to leave our foemen's sons, when we might kill them and remove the danger from our house.

ANDROMACHE

O husband mine! I would I had thy strong arm and spear to aid me, son of Priam.

MOLOSSUS

Ah, woe is me! what spell can I now find to turn death's stroke aside?

ANDROMACHE

Embrace thy master's knees, my child, and pray to him.

MOLOSSUS

Spare, O spare my life, kind master!

ANDROMACHE

Mine eyes are wet with tears, which trickle down my cheeks, as doth a sunless spring from a smooth rock. Ah me!

MOLOSSUS

What remedy, alas! can I provide me 'gainst my ills?

MENELAUS

Why fall at my knees in supplication? hard as the rock and deaf as the wave am I. My own friends have I helped, but for thee have I no tie of affection; for verily it cost me a great part of my life to capture Troy and thy mother; so thou shalt reap the fruit thereof and into Hades' halls descend.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Behold! I see Peleus drawing nigh; with aged step he hasteth hither.

(PELEUS *enters with an attendant.*)

PELEUS (*calling out as he comes in sight*)

What means this? I ask you and your executioner; why is the palace in an uproar? give a reason; what mean your lawless machinations? Menelaus, hold thy hand. Seek not to outrun justice. (*To his attendant*) For-

ward! faster, faster! for this matter, methinks, admits of no delay; now if ever would I fain resume the vigour of my youth. First however will I breathe new life into this captive, being to her as the breeze that blows a ship before the wind. Tell me, by what right have they pinioned thine arms and are dragging thee and thy child away? Like a ewe with her lamb art thou led to the slaughter, while I and thy lord were far away.

ANDROMACHE

Behold them that are haling me and my child to death, e'en as thou seest, aged prince. Why should I tell thee? For not by one urgent summons alone but by countless messengers have I sent for thee. No doubt thou knowest by hearsay of the strife in this house with this man's daughter, and the reason of my ruin. So now they have torn and are dragging me from the altar of Thetis, the goddess of thy chiefest adoration and the mother of thy gallant son, without any proper trial, yea, and without waiting for my absent master; because, forsooth, they knew my defencelessness and my child's, whom they mean to slay with me his hapless mother, though he has done no harm. But to thee, O sire, I make my supplication, prostrate at thy knees, though my hand cannot touch thy friendly beard; save me, I adjure thee, reverend sir, or to thy shame and my sorrow shall we be slain.

PELEUS

Loose her bonds, I say, ere some one rue it; untie her folded hands.

MENELAUS

I forbid it, for besides being a match for thee, I have a far better right to her.

PELEUS

What! art thou come hither to set my house in order? Art not content with ruling thy Spartans?

MENELAUS

She is my captive; I took her from Troy.

PELEUS

Aye, but my son's son received her as his prize.

MENELAUS

Is not all I have his, and all his mine?

PELEUS

For good, but not evil ends; and surely not for murderous violence.

MENELAUS

Never shalt thou wrest her from my grasp.

PELEUS

With this good staff I'll stain thy head with blood!

MENELAUS

Just touch me and see! Approach one step!

PELEUS

What! shalt thou rank with men? chief of cowards, son of cowards! What right hast thou to any place 'mongst men? Thou who didst let a Phrygian rob thee of thy wife, leaving thy home without bolt or guard, as if forsooth the cursed woman thou hadst there was a model of virtue. No! a Spartan maid could not be chaste, e'en if she would, who leaves her home and bares her limbs and lets her robe float free, to share with youths their races and their sports,—customs I cannot away with. Is it any wonder then that ye fail to educate your women in virtue? Helen might have asked thee this, seeing that she said goodbye to thy affection and tripped off with her young gallant to a foreign land. And yet for her sake thou didst marshal all the hosts of Hellas and lead them to Ilium, whereas thou shouldst have shown thy loathing for her by refusing to stir a spear, once thou hadst found her false; yea, thou shouldst have let her stay there, and even paid a price to save ever having her back again. But that was not at all the way thy thoughts were turned; wherefore many a brave life hast thou ended, and many an aged mother hast thou left childless in her home, and grey-haired sires of gallant sons hast reft. Of that sad band am I a member, seeing in thee Achilles' murderer like a malignant fiend; for thou and thou alone hast returned from Troy without a scratch, bringing back thy splendid weapons in their splendid cases just as they went. As for me, I ever told that amorous boy to form no alliance with thee nor take unto his home an evil mother's child; for daughters bear the marks of their mothers' ill-repute into their new homes. Wherefore, ye wooers, take heed to this my warning: "Choose the daughter of a good mother." And more than this, with what wanton insult didst thou treat thy brother, bidding him sacrifice his daughter in his simpleness! So fearful wast thou of losing thy worthless wife. Then after capturing Troy,—for thither too will I accompany thee,—thou didst not slay that woman, when she was in thy power; but as soon as thine eyes caught sight of her breast, thy sword was dropped and thou didst take her kisses, fondling the shameless traitress, too weak to stem thy hot desire, thou caitiff wretch! Yet spite of all thou art the man to come and work havoc in my grandson's halls when he is absent, seeking to slay with all indignity a poor weak woman and her babe; but that babe shall one day make thee and thy daughter in thy

home rue it, e'en though his birth be trebly base. Yea, for oft ere now hath seed, sown on barren soil, prevailed o'er rich deep tilth, and many a bastard has proved a better man than children better born. Take thy daughter hence with thee! Far better is it for mortals to have a poor honest man either as married kin or friend than a wealthy knave; but as for thee, thou art a thing of naught.

LEADER

The tongue from trifling causes contrives to breed great strife 'mongst men; wherefore are the wise most careful not to bring about a quarrel with their friends.

MENELAUS

Why, pray, should one call these old men wise, or those who once had a reputation in Hellas for being so? when thou, the great Peleus, son of a famous father, kin to me through marriage, employest language disgraceful to thyself and abusive of me because of a barbarian woman, though thou shouldst have banished her far beyond the streams of Nile or Phasis, and ever encouraged me; seeing that she comes from Asia's continent where fell so many of the sons of Hellas, victims to the spear; and likewise because she shared in the spilling of thy son's blood; for Paris who slew thy son Achilles, was brother to Hector, whose wife she was. And dost *thou* enter the same abode with her, and deign to let her share thy board, and suffer her to rear her brood of vipers in thy house? But I, after all this foresight for thee, old man, and myself, am to have her torn from my clutches for wishing to slay her. Yet come now, for 'tis no disgrace to argue; suppose my daughter has no child, while this woman's sons grow up, wilt thou set them up to rule the land of Phthia, barbarians born and bred to lord it over Hellenes? Am I then so void of sense because I hate injustice, and thou so full of cleverness? Consider yet another point; say thou hadst given a daughter of thine to some citizen, and hadst then seen her thus treated, wouldst thou have sat looking on in silence? I trow not. Dost thou then for a foreigner rail thus at thy nearest friends? Again, thou mayst say, husband and wife have an equally strong case if she is wronged by him, and similarly if he find her guilty of indiscretion in his house; yet while he has ample powers in his own hands, she depends on parents and friends for her case. Surely then I am right in helping my own kin! Thou art in thy dotage; for thou wilt do me more good by speaking of my generalship than by concealing it. Helen's trouble was not of her own choosing, but sent by heaven, and it proved a great benefit to Hellas; her sons, till then untried in war or arms, turned to deeds of prowess, and it is experience which teaches man all he knows. I showed my wisdom in refraining from slaying my wife, directly I caught sight of her. Would that thou too hadst ne'er slain Phocus! All this I bring before thee in pure

good-will, not from anger. But if thou resent it, thy tongue may wag till it ache, yet shall I gain by prudent forethought.

LEADER

Cease now from idle words, 'twere better far, for fear ye both alike go wrong.

PELEUS

Alas! what evil customs now prevail in Hellas! Whene'er the host sets up a trophy o'er the foe, men no more consider this the work of those who really toiled, but the general gets the credit for it. Now he was but one among ten thousand others to brandish his spear; he only did the work of one; but yet he wins more praise than they. Again, as magistrates in all the grandeur of office they scorn the common folk, though they are naught themselves; whereas those others are ten thousand times more wise than they, if daring combine with judgment. Even so thou and thy brother, exalted by the toilsome efforts of others, now take your seats in all the swollen pride of Trojan fame and Trojan generalship. But I will teach thee henceforth to consider Idaean Paris a foe less terrible than Peleus, unless forthwith thou pack from this roof, thou and thy childless daughter too, whom my own true son will hale through his halls by the hair of her head; for her barrenness will not let her endure fruitfulness in others, because she has no children herself. Still if misfortune prevents her bearing offspring, is that a reason why we should be left childless? Begone! ye varlets, let her go! I will soon see if anyone will hinder me from loosing her hands. (*to* ANDROMACHE) Arise; these trembling hands of mine will untie the twisted thongs that bind thee. Out on thee, coward! is this how thou hast galled her wrists? Didst think thou wert lashing up a lion or bull? or wert afraid she would snatch a sword and defend herself against thee? Come, child, nestle to thy mother's arms; help me loose her bonds; I will yet rear thee in Phthia to be their bitter foe. If your reputation for prowess and the battles ye have fought were taken from you Spartans, in all else, be very sure, you have not your inferiors.

LEADER

The race of old men practises no restraint; and their testiness makes it hard to check them.

MENELAUS

Thou art only too ready to rush into abuse; while, as for me, I came to Phthia by constraint and have therefore no intention either of doing or suffering anything mean. Now must I return home, for I have no time to waste; for there is a city not so very far from Sparta, which aforetime was friendly but now is hostile; against her will I march with my army

and bring her into subjection. And when I have arranged that matter as I wish, I will return; and face to face with my son-in-law I will give my version of the story and hear his. And if he punish her, and for the future she exercise self-control, she shall find me do the like; but if he storm, I'll storm as well; and every act of mine shall be a reflex of his own. As for thy babbling, I can bear it easily; for, like to a shadow as thou art, thy voice is all thou hast, and thou art powerless to do aught but talk.

(MENELAUS *and his retinue withdraw.*)

PELEUS

Lead on, my child, safe beneath my sheltering wing, and thou too, poor lady; for thou art come into a quiet haven after the rude storm.

ANDROMACHE

Heaven reward thee and all thy race, old sire, for having saved my child and me his hapless mother! Only beware lest they fall upon us twain in some lonely spot upon the road and force me from thee, when they see thy age, my weakness, and this child's tender years; take heed to this, that we be not a second time made captive, after escaping now.

PELEUS

Forbear such words, prompted by a woman's cowardice. Go on thy way; who will lay a finger on you? Methinks he will do it to his cost. For by heaven's grace I rule o'er many a knight and spearman bold in my kingdom of Phthia; yea, and myself can still stand straight, no bent old man as thou dost think; such a fellow as that a mere look from me will put to flight in spite of my years. For e'en an old man, be he brave, is worth a host of raw youths; for what avails a fine figure if a man is a coward?

(PELEUS, ANDROMACHE, *and* MOLOSSUS *go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Oh! to have never been born, or sprung from noble sires, the heir to mansions richly stored; for if aught untoward e'er befall, there is no lack of champions for sons of noble parents, and there is honour and glory for them when they are proclaimed scions of illustrious lines; time detracts not from the legacy these good men leave, but the light of their goodness still burns on when they are dead.

antistrophe

Better is it not to win a discreditable victory, than to make justice miscarry by an invidious exercise of power; for such a victory, though men think it sweet for the moment, grows barren in time and

comes near being a stain on a house. This is the life I commend, this the life I set before me as my ideal, to exercise no authority beyond what is right either in the marriage-chamber or in the state.

epode

O aged son of Aeacus! now am I sure that thou wert with the Lapithae, wielding thy famous spear, when they fought the Centaurs; and on Argo's deck didst pass the cheerless strait beyond the sea-beat Symplegades on her voyage famed; and when in days long gone the son of Zeus spread slaughter round Troy's famous town, thou too didst share his triumphant return to Europe.

(*The* NURSE OF HERMIONE *enters.*)

NURSE

Alas! good friends, what a succession of troubles is to-day provided us! My mistress Hermione within the house, deserted by her father and in remorse for her monstrous deed in plotting the death of Andromache and her child, is bent on dying; for she is afraid her husband will in requital for this expel her with dishonour from his house or put her to death, because she tried to slay the innocent. And the servants that watch her can scarce restrain her efforts to hang herself, scarce catch the sword and wrest it from her hand. So bitter is her anguish, and she hath recognized the villainy of her former deeds. As for me, friends, I am weary of keeping my mistress from the fatal noose; do ye go in and try to save her life; for if strangers come, they prove more persuasive than the friends of every day.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah yes! I hear an outcry in the house amongst the servants, confirming the news thou hast brought. Poor sufferer! she seems about to show a lively grief for her grave crimes; for she has escaped her servants' hands and is rushing from the house, eager to end her life.

(HERMIONE *enters, in agitation. She is carrying a sword which the* NURSE *wrests from her.*)

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Woe, woe is me! I will rend my hair and tear cruel furrows in my cheeks.

NURSE

My child, what wilt thou do? Wilt thou disfigure thyself?

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Ah me! ah me! Begone, thou fine-spun veil! float from my head away!

NURSE

Daughter, cover up thy bosom, fasten thy robe.

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Why should I cover it? My crimes against my lord are manifest and clear, they cannot be hidden.

NURSE

Art so grieved at having devised thy rival's death?

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Yea, I deeply mourn my fatal deeds of daring; alas! I am now accursed in all men's eyes!

NURSE

Thy husband will pardon thee this error.

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Oh! why didst thou hunt me to snatch away my sword? Give, oh! give it back, dear nurse, that I may thrust it through my heart Why dost thou prevent me hanging myself?

NURSE

What! was I to let thy madness lead thee on to death?

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Ah me, my destiny! Where can I find some friendly fire? To what rocky height can I climb above the sea or 'mid some wooded mountain glen, there to die and trouble but the dead?

NURSE

Why vex thyself thus? on all of us sooner or later heaven's visitation comes.

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Thou hast left me, O my father, left me like a stranded bark, all alone, without an oar. My lord will surely slay me; no home is mine henceforth beneath my husband's roof. What god is there to whose statue I can as a suppliant haste? or shall I throw myself in slavish wise at slavish knees? Would I could speed away from Phthia's land on bird's dark pinion, or like that pine-built ship,[2] the first that ever sailed betwixt the rocks Cyanean!

NURSE

My child, I can as little praise thy previous sinful excesses, committed against the Trojan captive, as thy present exaggerated terror. Thy hus-

band will never listen to a barbarian's weak pleading and reject his marriage with thee for this. For thou wast no captive from Troy whom he wedded, but the daughter of a gallant sire, with a rich dower, from a city too of no mean prosperity. Nor will thy father forsake thee, as thou dreadest, and allow thee to be cast out from this house. Nay, enter now, nor show thyself before the palace, lest the sight of thee there bring reproach upon thee, my daughter.

(*The* NURSE *departs as* ORESTES *and his attendants enter.*)

LEADER

Lo! a stranger of foreign appearance from some other land comes hurrying towards us.

ORESTES

Women of this foreign land! is this the home, the palace of Achilles' son?

LEADER

Thou hast it; but who art thou to ask such a question?

ORESTES

The son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, by name Orestes, on my way to the oracle of Zeus at Dodona. But now that I am come to Phthia, I am resolved to inquire about my kinswoman, Hermione of Sparta; is she alive and well? for though she dwells in a land far from my own, I love her none the less.

HERMIONE

Son of Agamemnon, thy appearing is as a haven from the storm to sailors; by thy knees I pray, have pity on me in my distress, on me of whose fortunes thou art inquiring. About thy knees I twine my arms with all the force of sacred fillets.

ORESTES

Ha! what is this? Am I mistaken or do I really see before me the queen of this palace, the daughter of Menelaus?

HERMIONE

The same, that only child whom Helen, daughter of Tyndareus, bore my father in his halls; never doubt that.

ORESTES

O saviour Phoebus, grant us respite from our woe! But what is the matter? art thou afflicted by gods or men?

HERMIONE

Partly by myself, partly by the man who wedded me, and partly by some god. On every side I see ruin.

ORESTES

Why, what misfortune could happen to a woman as yet childless, unless her honour is concerned?

HERMIONE

My very ill! Thou hast hit my case exactly.

ORESTES

On whom has thy husband set his affections in thy stead?

HERMIONE

On his captive, Hector's wife.

ORESTES

An evil case indeed, for a man to have two wives!

HERMIONE

'Tis even thus. So I resented it.

ORESTES

Didst thou with woman's craft devise a plot against thy rival?

HERMIONE

Yes, to slay her and her bastard child.

ORESTES

And didst thou slay them, or did something happen to rescue them from thee?

HERMIONE

It was old Peleus, who showed regard to the weaker side.

ORESTES

Hadst thou any accomplice in this attempted murder?

HERMIONE

My father came from Sparta for this very purpose.

ORESTES

And was he after all defeated by that old man's prowess?

HERMIONE

Oh no! but by shame; and he hath gone and left me all alone.

ORESTES

I understand; thou art afraid of thy husband for what thou hast done.

HERMIONE

Thou hast guessed it; for he will have a right to slay me. What can I say for myself? Yet I beseech thee by Zeus the god of our family, send me to a land as far as possible from this, or to my father's house; for these very walls seem to cry out "Begone!" and all the land of Phthia hates me. But if my lord return ere that from the oracle of Phoebus, he will put me to death on a shameful charge, or enslave me to his mistress, whom I ruled before. Maybe some one will say, "How was it thou didst go thus astray?" I was ruined by evil women who came to me and puffed me up with words like these: "Wait! wilt thou suffer that vile captive, a mere bondmaid, to dwell within thy house and share thy wedded rights? By Heaven's queen! if it were my house she should not live to reap my marriage-harvest!" And I listened to the words of these Sirens, the cunning, knavish, subtle praters, and was filled with silly thoughts. What need had I to care about my lord? I had all I wanted, wealth in plenty, a house in which I was mistress, and as for children, mine would be born in wedlock, while hers would be bastards, half-slaves to mine. Oh! never, never, —this truth will I repeat,—should men of sense, who have wives, allow women-folk to visit them in their homes, for they teach them evil; one, to gain some private end, helps to corrupt their honour; another, having made a slip herself, wants a companion in misfortune, while many are wantons; and hence it is men's houses are tainted. Wherefore keep strict guard upon the portals of your houses with bolts and bars; for these visits of strange women lead to no good result, but a world of ill.

LEADER

Thou hast given thy tongue too free a rein regarding thy own sex. I can pardon thee in this case, but still women ought to smooth over their sisters' weaknesses.

ORESTES

'Twas sage counsel he gave who taught men to hear the arguments on both sides. I, for instance, though aware of the confusion in this house, the quarrel between thee and Hector's wife, waited awhile and watched to see whether thou wouldst stay here or from fear of that captive art minded to quit these halls. Now it was not so much regard for thy message that brought me thither, as the intention of carrying thee away from this house, if, as now, thou shouldst grant me a chance of saying so. For thou wert mine formerly, but art now living with thy present husband through thy father's baseness; since he, before invading Troy's domains, betrothed thee to me, and then afterwards promised thee to thy present lord, provided he captured the city of Troy.

So, as soon as Achilles' son returned hither, I forgave thy father, but entreated the bridegroom to forego his marriage with thee, telling him

all I had endured and my present misfortune; I might get a wife, I said, from amongst friends, but outside their circle 'twas no easy task for one exiled like myself from home. Thereat he grew abusive, taunting me with my mother's murder and those blood-boltered fiends.[3] And I was humbled by the fortunes of my house, and though 'tis true, I grieved, yet did I bear my sorrow, and reluctantly departed, robbed of thy promised hand. Now therefore, since thou findest thy fortune so abruptly changed and art fallen thus on evil days and hast no help, I will take thee hence and place thee in thy father's hands. For kinship hath strong claims, and in adversity there is naught better than a kinsman's kindly aid.

HERMIONE

As for my marriage, my father must look to it; 'tis not for me to decide. Yes, take me hence as soon as may be, lest my husband come back to his house before I am gone, or Peleus hear that I am deserting his son's abode and pursue me with his swift steeds.

ORESTES

Rest easy about the old man's power; and, as for Achilles' son with all his insolence to me, never fear him; such a crafty net this hand hath woven and set for his death with knots that none can loose; whereof I will not speak before the time, but, when my plot begins to work, Delphi's rock will witness it. If but my allies in the Pythian land abide by their oaths, this same murderer of his mother will show that no one else shall marry thee my rightful bride. To his cost will he demand satisfaction of King Phoebus for his father's blood; nor shall his repentance avail him, though he is now submitting to the god. No! he shall perish miserably by Apollo's hand and my false accusations; so shall he find out my enmity. For the deity upsets the fortune of them that hate him, and suffers them not to be high-minded.

(ORESTES *and* HERMIONE *depart.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O Phoebus! who didst fence the hill of Ilium with a fair coronal of towers, and thou, ocean-god! coursing o'er the main with thy dark steeds, wherefore did ye hand over in dishonour your own handiwork to the war-god, master of the spear, abandoning Troy to wretchedness?

antistrophe 1

Many a well-horsed car ye yoked on the banks of Simois, and many a bloody tournament did ye ordain with never a prize to win; and Ilium's princes are dead and gone; no longer in Troy is seen the blaze of fire on altars of the gods with the smoke of incense.

strophe 2

The son of Atreus is no more, slain by the hand of his wife, and she herself hath paid the debt of blood by death, and from her children's hands received her doom. The god's own bidding from his oracle was levelled against her, in the day that Agamemnon's son set forth from Argos and visited his shrine; so he slew her, aye, spilt his own mother's blood. O Phoebus, O thou power divine, how can I believe the story?

antistrophe 2

Anon wherever Hellenes gather, was heard the voice of lamentation, mothers weeping o'er their children's fate, as they left their homes to mate with strangers. Ah! thou art not the only one, nor thy dear ones either, on whom the cloud of grief hath fallen. Hellas had to bear the visitation, and thence the scourge crossed to Phrygia's fruitful fields, raining the bloody drops the death-god loves.

(PELEUS *enters in haste.*)

PELEUS

Ye dames of Phthia, answer my questions. I heard a vague rumour that the daughter of Menelaus had left these halls and fled; so now am I come in hot haste to learn if this be true; for it is the duty of those who are at home to labour in the interests of their absent friends.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thou hast heard aright, O Peleus; ill would it become me to hide the evil case in which I now find myself; our queen has fled and left these halls.

PELEUS

What did she fear? explain that to me.

LEADER

She was afraid her lord would cast her out.

PELEUS

In return for plotting his child's death? surely not?

LEADER

Yea, and she was afraid of yon captive.

PELEUS

With whom did she leave the house? with her father?

LEADER

The son of Agamemnon came and took her hence.

PELEUS

What view hath he to further thereby? Will he marry her?

LEADER

Yes, and he is plotting thy grandson's death.

PELEUS

From an ambuscade, or meeting him fairly face to face?

LEADER

In the holy place of Loxias, leagued with Delphians.

PELEUS

God help us. This is a present danger. Hasten one of you with all speed to the Pythian altar and tell our friends there what has happened here, ere Achilles' son be slain by his enemies.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Woe worth the day! what evil tidings have I brought for thee, old sire, and for all who love my master! woe is me!

PELEUS

Alas! my prophetic soul hath a presentiment.

MESSENGER

Aged Peleus, hearken! Thy grandson is no more; so grievously is he smitten by the men of Delphi and the stranger from Mycenae.

LEADER

Ah! what wilt thou do, old man? Fall not; uplift thyself.

PELEUS

I am a thing of naught; death is come upon me. My voice is choked, my limbs droop beneath me.

MESSENGER

Hearken; if thou art eager also to avenge thy friends, lift up thyself and hear what happened.

PELEUS

Ah, destiny! how tightly hast thou caught me in thy toils, a poor old man at life's extremest verge! But tell me how he was taken from me, my one son's only child; unwelcome as such news is, I fain would hear it.

MESSENGER

As soon as we reached the famous soil of Phoebus, for three whole days were we feasting our eyes with the sight. And this, it seems, caused suspicion; for the folk, who dwell near the god's shrine, began to collect in groups, while Agamemnon's son, going to and fro through the town, would whisper in each man's ear malignant hints: "Do ye see yon fellow, going in and out of the god's treasure-chambers, which are full of the gold stored there by all mankind? He is come hither a second time on the same mission as before, eager to sack the temple of Phoebus." Thereon there ran an angry murmur through the city, and the magistrates flocked to their council-chamber, while those, who have charge of the god's treasures, had a guard privately placed amongst the colonnades. But we, knowing naught as yet of this, took sheep fed in the pastures of Parnassus, and went our way and stationed ourselves at the altars with vouchers and Pythian seers. And one said: "What prayer, young warrior, wouldst thou have us offer to the god? Wherefore art thou come?" And he answered: "I wish to make atonement to Phoebus for my past transgression; for once I claimed from him satisfaction for my father's blood." Thereupon the rumour, spread by Orestes, proved to have great weight, suggesting that my master was lying and had come on a shameful errand. But he crosses the threshold of the temple to pray to Phoebus before his oracle, and was busy with his burnt-offering; when a body of men armed with swords set themselves in ambush against him in the cover of the bay-trees, and Clytemnestra's son, that had contrived the whole plot was one of them. There stood the young man praying to the god in sight of all, when lo! with their sharp swords they stabbed Achilles' unprotected son from behind. But he stepped back, for it was not a mortal wound he had received, and drew his sword, and snatching armour from the pegs where it hung on a pillar, took his stand upon the altar-steps, the picture of a warrior grim; then cried he to the sons of Delphi, and asked them: "Why seek to slay me when I am come on a holy mission? What cause is there why I should die?" But of all that throng of bystanders, no man answered him a word, but they set to hurling stones. Then he, though bruised and battered by the showers of missiles from all sides, covered himself behind his mail and tried to ward off the attack, holding his shield first here, then there, at arm's length, but all of no avail; for a storm of darts, arrows and javelins, hurtling spits with double points, and butchers' knives for slaying steers, came flying at his feet; and terrible was the war-dance thou hadst then seen thy grandson dance to avoid their marksmanship. At last, when they were hemming him in on all sides, allowing him no breathing space, he left the shelter of the altar, the hearth where victims are placed, and with one bound was on them as on the Trojans of yore; and they turned and fled like doves when they see the hawk. Many fell in the confusion; some

wounded, and others trodden down by one another along the narrow passages; and in that hushed holy house uprose unholy din and echoed back from the rocks. Calm and still my master stood there in his gleaming harness like a flash of light, till from the inmost shrine there came a voice of thrilling horror, stirring the crowd to make a stand. Then fell Achilles' son, smitten through the flank by some Delphian's biting blade, some fellow that slew him with a host to help; and as he fell, there was not one that did not stab him, or cast a rock and batter his corpse. So his whole body, once so fair, was marred with savage wounds. At last they cast the lifeless clay, lying near the altar, forth from the fragrant fane. And we gathered up his remains forthwith and are bringing them to thee, old prince, to mourn and weep and honour with a deep-dug tomb.

This is how that prince who vouchsafeth oracles to others, that judge of what is right for all the world, hath revenged himself on Achilles' son, remembering his ancient quarrel as a wicked man would. How then can he be wise?

(*The* MESSENGER *withdraws as the body of Neoptolemus is carried in on a bier. The following lines between* PELEUS *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

Lo! e'en now our prince is being carried on a bier from Delphi's land unto his home. Woe for him and his sad fate, and woe for thee, old sire! for this is not the welcome thou wouldst give Achilles' son, the lion's whelp; thyself too by this sad mischance dost share his evil lot.

PELEUS

Ah! woe is me! here is a sad sight for me to see and take unto my halls! Ah me! ah me! I am undone, thou city of Thessaly! My line now ends; I have no children left me in my home. Oh! the sorrows I seem born to endure! What friend can I look to for relief? Ah, dear lips, and cheeks, and hands! Would thy destiny had slain thee 'neath Ilium's walls beside the banks of Simois!

CHORUS

Had he so died, my aged lord, he had won him honour thereby, and thine had been the happier lot.

PELEUS

O marriage, marriage, woe to thee! thou bane of my home, thou destroyer of my city! Ah my child, my boy, would that the honour of wedding thee, fraught with evil as it was to my children and house, had not thrown o'er thee, my son, Hermione's deadly net! O

that the thunderbolt had slain her sooner! and that thou, rash mortal, hadst never charged the great god Phoebus with aiming that murderous shaft that spilt thy hero-father's blood!

CHORUS

Woe! woe! alas! With due observance of funeral rites will I begin the mourning for my dead master.

PELEUS

Alack and well-a-day! I take up the tearful dirge, ah me! old and wretched as I am.

CHORUS

'Tis Heaven's decree; God willed this heavy stroke.

PELEUS

O darling child, thou hast left me all alone in my halls, old and childless by thy loss.

CHORUS

Thou shouldst have died, old sire, before thy children.

PELEUS

Shall I not tear my hair, and smite upon my head with grievous blows? O city! of both my children hath Phoebus robbed me.

CHORUS

What evils thou hast suffered, what sorrows thou hast seen, thou poor old man! what shall be thy life hereafter?

PELEUS

Childless, desolate, with no limit to my grief, I must drain the cup of woe, until I die.

CHORUS

'Twas all in vain the gods wished thee joy on thy wedding day.

PELEUS

All my hopes have flown away, fallen short of my high boasts.

CHORUS

A lonely dweller in a lonely home art thou.

PELEUS

I have no city any longer; there! on the ground my sceptre do I cast; and thou, daughter of Nereus, 'neath thy dim grotto, shalt see me grovelling in the dust, a ruined king.

CHORUS

Look, look! (*A dim form of divine appearance is seen hovering in mid air.*) What is that moving? what influence divine am I conscious of? Look, maidens, mark it well; see, yonder is some deity, wafted through the lustrous air and alighting on the plains of Phthia, home of steeds.

THETIS (*from above*)

O Peleus! because of my wedded days with thee now long agone, I Thetis am come from the halls of Nereus. And first I counsel thee not to grieve to excess in thy present distress, for I too who need ne'er have borne children to my sorrow, have lost the child of our love, Achilles swift of foot, foremost of the sons of Hellas. Next will I declare why I am come, and do thou give ear. Carry yonder corpse, Achilles' son, to the Pythian altar and there bury it, a reproach to Delphi, that his tomb may proclaim the violent death he met at the hand of Orestes. And for his captive wife Andromache,—she must dwell in the Molossian land, united in honourable wedlock with Helenus, and with her this babe, the sole survivor as he is of all the line of Aeacus, for from him a succession of prosperous kings of Molossia is to go on unbroken; for the race that springs from thee and me, my aged lord, must not thus be brought to naught; no! nor Troy's line either; for her fate too is cared for by the gods, albeit her fall was due to the eager wish of Pallas. Thee too, that thou mayst know the saving grace of wedding me, will I, a goddess born and daughter of a god, release from all the ills that flesh is heir to and make a deity to know not death nor decay. From henceforth in the halls of Nereus shalt thou dwell with me, god and goddess together; thence shalt thou rise dry-shod from out the main and see Achilles, our dear son, settled in his island-home by the strand of Leuce, that is girdled by the Euxine sea. But get thee to Delphi's god-built town, carrying this corpse with thee, and, after thou hast buried him, return and settle in the cave which time hath hollowed in the Sepian rock and there abide, till from the sea I come with choir of fifty Nereids to be thy escort thence; for fate's decree thou must fulfil; such is the pleasure of Zeus. Cease then to mourn the dead; this is the lot which heaven assigns to all, and all must pay their debt to death.

PELEUS

Great queen, my honoured wife, from Nereus sprung, all hail! thou art acting herein as befits thyself and thy children. So I will stay my grief at thy bidding, goddess, and, when I have buried the dead, will seek the glens of Pelion, even the place where I took thy beauteous form to my embrace. Surely after this every prudent man will seek to marry a wife of noble stock and give his daughter to a husband good and true, never setting his

heart on a worthless woman, not even though she bring a sumptuous dowry to his house. So would men ne'er suffer ill at heaven's hand.

(THETIS *vanishes.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Many are the shapes of Heaven's denizens, and many a thing they bring to pass contrary to our expectation; that which we thought would be is not accomplished, while for the unexpected God finds out a way. E'en such hath been the issue of this matter.[4]

COLERIDGE's translation has been slightly altered in the following lines: 79, 179, 238, 333, 352, 370, 403, 480, 482, 648, 662, 713, 784, 795, 826, 837, 906, 930, 946, 953, 973, 980, 983, 992, 1056–1057, 1066.

1. Coleridge's note to this line runs: "Neoptolemus demanded satisfaction for his father's death because Apollo directed the fatal arrow of Paris which killed Achilles."

2. *i.e.,* the Argo.

3. *i.e.,* the Furies.

4. These lines are found likewise at the conclusion of the *Alcestis, Helen, The Bacchae,* and, with a slight addition, the *Medea.*

VI
THE HERACLEIDAE

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

IOLAUS, *friend of Heracles*
COPREUS, *herald of* EURYSTHEUS
DEMOPHON, *King of Athens*
MACARIA, *daughter of Heracles*
SERVANT, *of Hyllus, son of Heracles*
ALCMENA, *mother of Heracles*
MESSENGER
EURYSTHEUS, *King of Argos*
CHORUS OF AGED ATHENIANS
Acamas, the brother of DEMOPHON, *younger sons of Heracles, attendants, guards, etc.*

INTRODUCTION

LIKE the *Andromache*, *The Heracleidae* reflects the contemporary events of the war between Athens and Sparta. Though the play cannot be exactly dated, most critics agree that it must have appeared during the earlier years of the conflict. A spirit of intense national patriotism pervades the piece, and Athens is glorified both implicitly and explicitly, first by laying the scene at Marathon, next by stressing the traditional Athenian piety towards the gods, her democratic institutions, the essential nobility of her citizens, and finally her willingness to protect the weak. There can be no doubt that Euripides' preoccupation with this patriotic purpose accounts for the inferior dramatic structure of the play.

In a characteristic Euripidean prologue, Iolaus, an old companion of Heracles, sketches the situation at the beginning of the drama. The children of Heracles, protected only by Alcmena, Heracles' mother, and Iolaus, have sought refuge at the temple of Zeus in Marathon in their effort to flee from their father's ancient and violent enemy, Eurystheus. The latter after Heracles' death desired to slay them, but they and their guardians managed to escape from Argos, and have vainly sought protection from one state in Greece after another, since Eurystheus has relentlessly pursued them. The action of the play records how Athens successfully defended the fugitives.

If the central principle of unity for the play lies in the glorification of Athens, Euripides has allowed certain extraneous elements to creep into its composition. For example, he introduces the motif of Macaria's sacrifice. Demophon, the Athenian king, reports that a maiden born of a noble sire must be immolated if the Athenian arms are to succeed against the attack of Eurystheus. Macaria willingly offers to give up her life on these terms, and after a farewell speech, replete with genuine pathos, leaves the scene, but Euripides makes no further reference to her in the remainder of the play, except perhaps in one place where the text is dubious (line 822). Likewise the half-comic scene of the arming of old Iolaus seems to strike a discordant note, though the passage may be an abortive attempt at pathos. Furthermore it is difficult to determine why Eurystheus, the arch-villain at the beginning of the play, suddenly be-

comes a most sympathetic figure at the end when he courageously faces death. Or again, we cannot understand why Alcmena in the same closing scene exhibits a painful gloating vindictiveness, for which we are completely unprepared. Various suggestions have been made to explain these difficulties. One critic has urged that the piece was written as a substitute for a Satyr-play, like the *Alcestis*. Others have argued that the text is now incomplete and that the complete version had not only fuller choral passages, but also contained an account of Macaria's death similar to Talthybius' report of Polyxena's fate in the *Hecuba*. As the play now stands, it leaves much to be desired, since its general patriotic tone does not sufficiently compensate for its dramatic flaws and its lack of unity. One therefore may easily understand why the play has not enjoyed wide popularity.

THE HERACLEIDAE

(SCENE:—*Before the altar and temple of Zeus at Marathon.* IOLAUS, *an old man, and the children of Heracles are seen on the steps of the altar.*)

IOLAUS

I HOLD this true, and long have held: Nature hath made one man upright for his neighbours' good, while another hath a disposition wholly given over to gain, useless alike to the state and difficult to have dealings with, but for himself the best of men; and this I know, not from mere hearsay. For I, from pure regard and reverence for my kith and kin, though I might have lived at peace in Argos, alone of all my race shared with Heracles his labours, while he was yet with us, and now that he dwells in heaven, I keep these his children safe beneath my wing, though myself I need protection. For when their father passed from earth away, Eurystheus would first of all have slain us, but we escaped. And though our home is lost, our life was saved. But in exile we wander from city to city, ever forced to roam. For, added to our former wrongs, Eurystheus thought it fit to put this further outrage upon us: wheresoe'er he heard that we were settling, thither would he send heralds demanding our surrender and driving us from thence, holding out this threat, that Argos is no mean city to make a friend or foe, and furthermore pointing to his own prosperity. So they, seeing how weak my means, and these little ones left without a father, bow to his superior might and drive us from their land. And I share the exile of these children, and help them bear their evil lot by my sympathy, loth to betray them, lest someone say, "Look you! now that the children's sire is dead, Iolaus no more protects them, kinsman though he is." Not one corner left us in the whole of Hellas, we are come to Marathon and its neighbouring land, and here we sit as suppliants at the altars of the gods, and pray their aid; for 'tis said two sons of Theseus dwell upon these plains, the lot of their inheritance, scions of Pandion's stock, related to these children; this the reason we have come on this our way to the borders of glorious Athens. To lead the flight two aged guides are we; my care is centred on these boys, while she, I mean Alcmena, clasps her son's daughter in her arms, and bears her for safety within

this shrine, for we shrink from letting tender maidens come anigh the crowd or stand as suppliants at the altar. Now Hyllus and the elder of his brethren are seeking some place for us to find a refuge, if we are driven by force from this land. O children, children, come hither! hold unto my robe; for lo! I see a herald coming towards us from Eurystheus, by whom we are persecuted, wanderers excluded from every land. A curse on thee and him that sent thee, hateful wretch! for that same tongue of thine hath oft announced its master's evil hests to these children's noble sire as well.

(COPREUS, *the herald of* EURYSTHEUS, *enters.*)

COPREUS

Doubtless thy folly lets thee think this is a good position to have taken up, and that thou art come to a city that will help thee. No! there is none that will prefer thy feeble arm to the might of Eurystheus. Begone! why take this trouble? Thou must arise and go to Argos, where awaits thee death by stoning.

IOLAUS

Not so, for the god's altar will protect me, and this land of freedom, wherein we have set foot.

COPREUS

Wilt give me the trouble of laying hands on thee?

IOLAUS

By force at least shalt thou never drag these children hence.

COPREUS

That shalt thou soon learn; it seems thou wert a poor prophet, after all, in this.

(COPREUS *seizes the children.*)

IOLAUS

This shall never happen while I live.

COPREUS

Begone! for I will take them hence, for all thy refusals, for I hold that they belong to Eurystheus, as they do indeed.

(*He throws* IOLAUS *to the ground.*)

IOLAUS

Help, ye who long have had your home in Athens! we suppliants at Zeus' altar in your market-place are being haled by force away, our sacred wreaths defiled, shame to your city, to the gods dishonour.

(*The* CHORUS OF AGED ATHENIANS *enters.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hark, hark! What cry is this that rises near the altar? At once explain the nature of the trouble.

IOLAUS

See this aged frame hurled in its feebleness upon the ground! Woe is me!

LEADER

Who threw thee down thus pitiably?

IOLAUS

Behold the man who flouts your gods, kind sirs, and tries by force to drag me from my seat before the altar of Zeus.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

From what land, old stranger, art thou come to this confederate state of four cities? or have ye left Euboea's cliffs, and, with the oar that sweeps the sea, put in here from across the firth?

IOLAUS

Sirs, no island life I lead, but from Mycenae to thy land I come.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

What do they call thee, aged sir, those folk in Mycenae?

IOLAUS

Maybe ye have heard of Iolaus, the comrade of Heracles, for he was not unknown to fame.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Yea, I have heard of him in bygone days; but tell me, whose are the tender boys thou bearest in thine arms?

IOLAUS

These, sirs, are the sons of Heracles, come as suppliants to you and your city.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

What is their quest? Are they anxious, tell me, to obtain an audience of the state?

IOLAUS

That so they may escape surrender, nor be torn with violence from thy altars, and brought to Argos.

COPREUS

Nay, this will nowise satisfy thy masters, who o'er thee have a right, and so have tracked thee hither.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Stranger, 'tis but right we should reverence the gods' suppliants, suffering none with violent hand to make them leave the altars, for that will dread Justice ne'er permit.

COPREUS

Do thou then drive these subjects of Eurystheus forth, and this hand of mine shall abstain from violence.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

'Twere impious for the state to neglect the suppliant stranger's prayer.

COPREUS

Yet 'tis well to keep clear of troubles, by adopting that counsel, which is the wiser.

LEADER

Thou then shouldst have told the monarch of this land thy errand before being so bold, out of regard to his country's freedom, instead of trying to drag strangers by force from the altars of the gods.

COPREUS

Who is monarch of this land and state?

LEADER

Demophon, son of gallant Theseus.

COPREUS

Surely it were most to the purpose to discuss this matter somewhat with him; all else has been said in vain.

LEADER

Lo! here he comes in person, in hot haste, and Acamas his brother, to hear what thou hast to say.

(DEMOPHON, *Acamas, and their retinue enter.*)

DEMOPHON

Since thou for all thy years hast outstripped younger men in coming to the rescue to this altar of Zeus, do thou tell me what hath chanced to bring this crowd together.

LEADER

There sit the sons of Heracles as suppliants, having wreathed the altar, as thou seest, O king, and with them is Iolaus, trusty comrade of their sire.

DEMOPHON

Why should this event have called for cries of pain?

LEADER (*turning to* COPREUS)

This fellow caused the uproar by trying to drag them forcibly from this altar, and he hurled down the old man, till my tears for pity flowed.

DEMOPHON

Hellenic dress and fashion in his robes doth he no doubt adopt, but deeds like these betray the barbarian. Thou, sirrah, tell me straight the country whence thou camest thither.

COPREUS

An Argive I; since that thou seek'st to know. Who sent me, and the object of my coming, will I freely tell. Eurystheus, king of Mycenae, sends me hither to fetch these back; and I have come, sir stranger, with just grounds in plenty, alike for speech or action. An Argive myself, Argives I come to fetch, taking with me these runaways from my native city, on whom the doom of death was passed by our laws there; and we have a right, since we rule our city independently, to ratify its sentences. And though they have come as suppliants to the altars of numerous others, we have taken our stand on these same arguments, and no one has ventured to bring upon himself evils of his own getting. But they have come hither, either because they perceived some folly in thee, or, in their perplexity, staking all on one risky throw to win or lose; for surely they do not suppose that thou, if so thou hast thy senses still, and only thou, in all the breadth of Hellas they have traversed, wilt pity their foolish troubles. Come now, put argument against argument: what will be thy gain, suppose thou admit them to thy land, or let us take them hence? From us these benefits are thine to win: this city can secure as friends Argos, with its far-reaching arm, and Eurystheus' might complete; whilst if thou lend an ear to their piteous pleading and grow soft, the matter must result in trial of arms; for be sure we shall not yield this struggle without appealing to the sword. What pretext wilt thou urge? Of what domains art thou robbed that thou shouldst take and wage war with the Tirynthian Argives? What kind of allies art thou aiding? For whom will they have fallen whom thou buriest? Surely thou wilt get an evil name from the citizens, if for the sake of an old man near the grave, a mere shadow I may say, and for these children, thou wilt plunge into troublous

waters. The best thou canst say is, that thou wilt find in them a hope, and nothing more; and yet this falls far short of the present need; for these would be but a poor match for Argives even when fully armed and in their prime, if haply that raises thy spirits; moreover, the time 'twixt now and then is long, wherein ye may be blotted out. Nay, hearken to me; give me naught, but let me take mine own, and so gain Mycenae; but forbear to act now, as is your Athenian way, and take the weaker side, when it is in thy power to choose the stronger as thy friends.

LEADER

Who can decide a cause or ascertain its merits, till from both sides he clearly learn what they would say?

IOLAUS

O king, in thy land I start with this advantage, the right to hear and speak in turn, and none, ere that, will drive me hence as elsewhere they would. 'Twixt us and him is naught in common, for we no longer have aught to do with Argos since that decree was passed, but we are exiles from our native land; how then can he justly drag us back as subjects of Mycenae, seeing that they have banished us? For we are strangers. Or do ye claim that every exile from Argos is exiled from the bounds of Hellas? Not from Athens surely; for ne'er will she for fear of Argos drive the children of Heracles from her land. Here is no Trachis, not at all; no! nor that Achaean town, whence thou, defying justice, but boasting of the might of Argos in the very words thou now art using, didst drive the suppliants from their station at the altar. If this shall be, and they thy words approve, why then I trow this is no more Athens, the home of freedom. Nay, but I know the temper and nature of these citizens; they would rather die, for honour ranks before mere life with men of worth. Enough of Athens! for excessive praise is apt to breed disgust; and oft ere now I have myself felt vexed at praise that knows no bounds. But to thee, as ruler of this land, I fain would show the reason why thou art bound to save these children. Pittheus was the son of Pelops; from him sprung Aethra, and from her Theseus thy sire was born. And now will I trace back these children's lineage for thee. Heracles was son of Zeus and Alcmena; Alcmena sprang from Pelops' daughter; therefore thy father and their father would be the sons of first cousins. Thus then art thou to them related, O Demophon, but thy just debt to them beyond the ties of kinship do I now declare to thee; for I assert, in days gone by, I was with Theseus on the ship, as their father's squire, when they went to fetch that girdle fraught with death; [1] yea, and from Hades' murky dungeons did Heracles bring thy father up; as all Hellas doth attest. Wherefore in return they crave this boon of thee, that they be not surrendered up nor torn by force from the altars of thy gods and cast forth from the land. For this were

shame on thee, and hurtful likewise in thy state, should suppliants, exiles, kith and kin of thine, be haled away by force. In pity cast one glance at them. I do entreat thee, laying my suppliant bough upon thee, by thy hands and beard, slight not the sons of Heracles, now that thou hast them in thy power to help. Show thyself their kinsman and their friend; be to them father, brother, lord; for better each and all of these than to fall beneath the Argives' hand.

LEADER

O king, I pity them, hearing their sad lot. Now more than ever do I see noble birth o'ercome by fortune; for these, though sprung from a noble sire, are suffering what they ne'er deserved.

DEMOPHON

Three aspects of the circumstance constrain me, Iolaus, not to spurn the guests thou bringest; first and foremost, there is Zeus, at whose altar thou art seated with these tender children gathered round thee; next come ties of kin, and the debt I owe to treat them kindly for their father's sake; and last, mine honour, which before all I must regard; for if I permit this altar to be violently despoiled by stranger hands, men will think the land I inhabit is free no more, and that through fear I have surrendered suppliants to Argives, and this comes nigh to make one hang oneself. Would that thou hadst come under a luckier star! yet, as it is, fear not that any man shall tear thee and these children from the altar by force. (*to* COPREUS) Get thee to Argos and tell Eurystheus so; yea and more, if he have any charge against these strangers, he shall have justice; but never shalt thou drag them hence.

COPREUS

Not even if I have right upon my side and prove my case?

DEMOPHON

How can it be right to drag the suppliant away by force?

COPREUS

Well, mine is the disgrace; no harm will come to thee.

DEMOPHON

'Tis harm to me, if I let them be haled away by thee.

COPREUS

Banish them thyself, and then will I take them from elsewhere.

DEMOPHON

Nature made thee a fool, to think thou knowest better than the god.

COPREUS

It seems then evildoers are to find a refuge here.

DEMOPHON

A temple of the gods is an asylum open to the world.

COPREUS

Maybe they will not take this view in Mycenae.

DEMOPHON

What! am I not lord of this domain?

COPREUS

So long as thou injure not the Argives, and if wise, thou wilt not.

DEMOPHON

Be injured for all I care, provided I sin not against the gods.

COPREUS

I would not have thee come to blows with Argos.

DEMOPHON

I am of like mind in this; but I will not dismiss these from my protection.

COPREUS

For all that, I shall take and drag my own away.

DEMOPHON

Why then perhaps thou wilt find a difficulty in returning to Argos.

COPREUS

That shall I soon find out by making the attempt.

DEMOPHON

Touch them and thou shalt rue it, and that without delay.

LEADER

I conjure thee, never dare to strike a herald.

DEMOPHON

Strike I will, unless that herald learn discretion.

LEADER

Depart; and thou, O king, touch him not.

COPREUS

I go; for 'tis feeble fighting with a single arm. But I will come again, bringing hither a host of Argive troops, spearmen clad in bronze; for countless warriors are awaiting my return, and king Eurystheus in person at their head; anxiously he waits the issue here on the borders of Alcathous' realm. And when he hears thy haughty answer, he will burst upon thee, and thy citizens, on this land and all that grows therein; for all in vain should we possess such hosts of picked young troops in Argos, should we forbear to punish thee.

(COPREUS *departs.*)

DEMOPHON

Perdition seize thee! I am not afraid of thy Argos. Be very sure thou shalt not drag these suppliants hence by force, to my shame; for I hold not this city subject unto Argos, but independently.

CHORUS (*singing*)

'Tis time to use our forethought, ere the host of Argos approach our frontier, for exceeding fierce are the warriors of Mycenae, and in the present case still more than heretofore. For all heralds observe this custom, to exaggerate what happened twofold. Bethink thee what a tale he will tell his master of his dreadful treatment, how he came near losing his life altogether.

IOLAUS

Children have no fairer prize than this, the being born of a good and noble sire, and the power to wed from noble families; but whoso is enslaved by passion and makes a lowborn match, I cannot praise for leaving to his children a legacy of shame, to gratify himself. For noble birth offers a stouter resistance to adversity than base parentage; for we, in the last extremity of woe, have found friends and kinsmen here, the only champions of these children through all the length and breadth of this Hellenic world. Give, children, give to them your hand, and they the same to you; draw near to them. Ah! children, we have made trial of our friends, and if ever ye see the path that leads you back to your native land, and possess your home and the honours of your father, count them ever as your friends and saviours, and never lift against their land the foeman's spear, in memory of this, but hold this city first midst those ye love. Yea, they well deserve your warm regard, in that they have shifted from our shoulders to their own the enmity of so mighty a land as Argos and its people, though they saw we were vagabonds and beggars; still they did not give us up nor drive us forth. So while I live, and after death,—come when it will,—loudly will I sing thy praise, good friend, and will extol thee as I stand at Theseus' side, and cheer his heart, as I tell how

thou didst give kind welcome and protection to the sons of Heracles, and how nobly thou dost preserve thy father's fame through the length of Hellas, and hast not fallen from the high estate to which thy father brought thee, a lot which few others can boast; for 'mongst the many wilt thou find one maybe, that is not degenerate from his sire.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This land is ever ready in an honest cause to aid the helpless. Wherefore ere now it hath endured troubles numberless for friends, and now in this I see a struggle nigh at hand.

DEMOPHON

Thou hast spoken well, and I feel confident their conduct will be such; our kindness will they not forget. Now will I muster the citizens and set them in array, that I may receive Mycenae's host with serried ranks. But first will I send scouts to meet them, lest they fall upon me unawares; for at Argos every man is prompt to answer to the call, and I will assemble prophets and ordain a sacrifice. But do thou leave the altar of Zeus and go with the children into the house; for there are those who will care for thee, even though I be abroad. Enter then my house, old man.

IOLAUS

I will not leave the altar. Let us sit here still, praying for the city's fair success, and when thou hast made a glorious end of this struggle, will we go unto the house; nor are the gods who champion us weaker than the gods of Argos, O king; Hera, wife of Zeus, is their leader; Athena ours. And this I say is an omen of success, that we have the stronger deity, for Pallas will not brook defeat.

(DEMOPHON *and his retinue go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Though loud thy boasts, there be others care no more for thee for that, O stranger from the land of Argos; nor wilt thou scare my soul with swelling words. Not yet be this the fate of mighty Athens, beauteous town! But thou art void of sense, and so is he, who lords it o'er Argos, the son of Sthenelus,

antistrophe

thou that comest to another state, in no wise weaker than Argos, and, stranger that thou art, wouldst drag away by force suppliants of the gods, wanderers that cling to my land for help, refusing to yield to our king, nor yet having any honest plea to urge. How can such conduct count as honourable, at least in wise men's judgment?

epode

I am for peace myself; yet I tell thee, wicked king, although thou come unto my city, thou shalt not get so easily what thou expectest. Thou art not the only man to wield a sword or targe with plates of brass. Nay, thou eager warrior, I warn thee, bring not war's alarms against our lovely town; restrain thyself.

(DEMOPHON *re-enters.*)

IOLAUS

My son, why, prithee, art thou returned with that anxious look? Hast thou news of the enemy? Are they coming, are they here, or what thy tidings? For of a surety yon herald will not play us false. No! sure I am their captain, prosperous heretofore, will come, with thoughts exceeding proud against Athens. But Zeus doth punish overweening pride.

DEMOPHON

The host of Argos is come, and Eurystheus its king; my own eyes saw him, for the man who thinks he knows good generalship must see the foe not by messengers alone. As yet, however, he hath not sent his host into the plain, but, camped upon a rocky brow, is watching—I only tell thee what I think this means—to see by which road to lead his army hither without fighting, and how to take up a safe position in this land. However, all my plans are by this time carefully laid; the city is under arms, the victims stand ready to be slain to every god, whose due this is; my seers have filled the town with sacrifices, to turn the foe to flight and keep our country safe. All those who chant prophetic words have I assembled, and have examined ancient oracles, both public and secret, as means to save this city. And though the several answers differ in many points, yet in one is the sentiment of all clearly the same; they bid me sacrifice to Demeter's daughter some maiden from a noble father sprung. Now I, though in your cause I am as zealous as thou seest, yet will not slay my child, nor will I compel any of my subjects to do so against his will; for who of his own will doth harbour such an evil thought as to yield with his own hands the child he loves? And now thou mayest see angry gatherings, where some declare, 'tis right to stand by suppliant strangers, while others charge me with folly; but if I do this deed, a civil war is then and there at hand. Do thou then look to this and help to find a way to save yourselves and this country without causing me to be slandered by the citizens. For I am no despot like a barbarian monarch; but provided I do what is just, just will my treatment be.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Can it be that heaven forbids this city to help strangers, when it hath the will and longing so to do?

IOLAUS

My children, we are even as those mariners, who have escaped the storm's relentless rage, and have the land almost within their reach, but after all are driven back from shore by tempests to the deep again. Even so we, just as we reach the shore in seeming safety, are being thrust back from this land. Ah me! Why, cruel hope, didst thou then cheer my heart, though thou didst not mean to make the boon complete? The king may well be pardoned, if he will not slay his subjects' children; and with my treatment here I am content; if indeed 'tis heaven's will, I thus should fare, still is my gratitude to thee in no wise lost. Children, I know not what to do for you. Whither shall we turn? for what god's altar have we left uncrowned? to what fenced city have we failed to go? Ruin and surrender are our instant lot, poor children! If I must die, 'tis naught to me, save that thereby I give those foes of mine some cause for joy. But you, children, I lament and pity, and that aged mother of your sire, Alcmena. Ah, woe is thee for thy long span of life! and woe is me for all my idle toil! 'Twas after all our destined doom to fall into the hands of our hated foe, and die a death of shame and misery. But lend me thine aid, thou knowest how; for all hope of these children's safety has not yet left me. Give me up instead of them to the Argives, O king; run no risk, but let me save the children; to love my life becomes me not; let it pass. Me will Eurystheus be most glad to take and treat despitefully, as I was Heracles' companion; for the man is but a boor; wherefore wise men ought to pray to get a wise man for their foe, and not a proud senseless fool; for so, even if by fortune flouted, one would meet with much consideration.

LEADER

Old man, blame not this city; for though perhaps a gain to us, yet would it be a foul reproach that we betrayed strangers.

DEMOPHON

A generous scheme is thine, but impossible. 'Tis not in quest of thee yon king comes marching hither; what would Eurystheus gain by the death of one so old? Nay, 'tis these children's blood he wants. For there is danger to a foe in the youthful scions of a noble race, whose memory dwells upon their father's wrongs; all this Eurystheus must foresee. But if thou hast any scheme besides, that better suits the time, be ready with it, for, since I heard that oracle, I am at a loss and full of fear.

(MACARIA *enters from the temple.*)

MACARIA

Sirs, impute not boldness to me, because I venture forth; this shall be my first request, for a woman's fairest crown is this, to practise silence and discretion, and abide at home in peace. But when I heard thy lamenta-

tions, Iolaus, I came forth, albeit I was not appointed to take the lead in my family. Still in some sense am I fit to do so, for these my brothers are my chiefest care, and I fain would ask, as touching myself, whether some new trouble, added to the former woes, is gnawing at thy heart.

IOLAUS

My daughter, 'tis nothing new that I should praise thee, as I justly may, above all the children of Heracles. Our house seemed to be prospering, when back it fell again into a hopeless state; for the king declares the prophets signify that he must order the sacrifice, not of bull or heifer, but of some tender maid of noble lineage, if we and this city are to exist. Herein is our perplexity; the king refuses either to sacrifice his own or any other's child. Wherefore, though he use not terms express, yet doth he hint, that, unless we find some way out of this perplexity, we must seek some other land, for he this country fain would save.

MACARIA

Are these indeed the terms on which our safety depends?

IOLAUS

Yea, on these; if, that is, we are successful otherwise.

MACARIA

No longer then cower before the hated Argive spear; for I, of my own free will, or ever they bid me, am ready to die and offer myself as a victim. For what excuse have we, if, while this city deems it right to incur a great danger on our behalf, we, though we might save ourselves, fly from death, by foisting our trouble on others? No! indeed, 'twere surely most ridiculous to sit and mourn as suppliants of the gods, and show ourselves but cowards, children as we are of that illustrious sire. Where among the brave is such conduct seen? Better, I suppose, this city should be taken and I (which Heaven forefend!) fall into the hands of the enemy, and then, for all I am my noble father's child, meet an awful doom, and face the Death-god none the less. Shall I wander as an exile from this land? Shall I not feel shame then, when someone says, as say they will, "Why are ye come hither with suppliant boughs, loving your lives too well? Begone from our land! for we will not succour cowards." Nay, if these be slain and I alone be saved, I have no hope in any wise of being happy, though many ere now have in this hope betrayed their friends. For who will care to wed a lonely maid or make me mother of his children? 'Tis better I should die than meet such treatment, little as I merit it. This were fitter treatment for some other, one that is not born to fame as I am. Conduct me to the scene of death, crown me with garlands, and begin the rites, if so it please you; then be victorious o'er the foe, for here

I offer my life freely and without constraint, and for my brothers and myself I undertake to die. For I, by loving not my life too well, have found a treasure very fair, a glorious means to leave it.

LEADER

Ah, what shall I say on hearing the maid's brave words, she that is ready to die for her brothers? Who can speak more noble words or do more noble deeds henceforth for ever?

IOLAUS

Daughter, thou art his own true child, no other man's but Heracles', that godlike soul; proud am I of thy words, though I sorrow for thy lot. Yet will I propose a fairer method: 'tis right to summon hither all the sisters of this maiden, and then let her, on whom the lot shall fall, die for her family; for that thou shouldst die without the lot is not just.

MACARIA

My death shall no chance lot decide; there is no graciousness in that; peace! old friend. But if ye accept and will avail you of my readiness, freely do I offer my life for these, and without constraint.

IOLAUS

Ah, this is even nobler than thy former word; that was matchless, but thou dost now surpass thy bravery and noble speech. I cannot bid, will not forbid thy dying, O my daughter! for by thy death thou dost thy brothers serve.

MACARIA

A cautious bidding thine! Fear not to take a stain of guilt from me, only let me die as one whose death is free. Follow me, old friend, for in thy arms I fain would die; stand by and veil my body with my robe, for I will go even to the dreadful doom of sacrifice, seeing whose daughter I avow myself.

IOLAUS

I cannot stand by and see thee bleed.

MACARIA

At least do thou beg me this boon of the king, that I may breathe out my life in women's arms instead of men's.

DEMOPHON

It shall be so, unhappy maid; for this were shame to me to refuse thee honour due, for many reasons: because thou hast a soul so brave; because 'tis right; and thou hast shown more courage than any of thy sex my eyes have ever seen. Now, if thou hast aught to say to these children or thy aged guide, oh! say the last thou hast to say—then go.

MACARIA

Farewell, old friend, farewell! and prithee teach these children to be like thyself, wise at every point; let them strive no further, for that will suffice them. And seek to save them from death, even as thou art anxious to do; thy children are we, thy care it was that nurtured us. Thou seest how I yield my bridal bloom to die for them. For you, my brothers gathered here, may you be happy! and may every blessing be yours, for the which my blood shall pay the price! Honour this old friend, and her that is within the house, Alcmena, the aged mother of my sire, and these strangers too. And if ever heaven for you devise release from trouble and a return to your home, remember the burial due to her that saved you, a funeral fair as I deserve; for I have not failed, but stood by you, and died to save my race. This shall be my pearl of price instead of children, and for the maiden life I leave, if there be really aught beyond the grave —God grant there may not be! For if, e'en there, we who are to die shall find a life of care, I know not whither one shall turn; for death is held a sovereign cure for every ill.

IOLAUS

Maiden of heroic soul, transcending all thy race, be sure the fame that thou shalt win from us, in life, in death, shall leave the rest of women far behind; farewell to thee! I dare not say harsh words of her to whom thou art devoted, the goddess-daughter of Demeter.

(DEMOPHON *leads* MACARIA *away*.)

Children, I am undone, grief unnerves my limbs; take hold and support me to a seat hard by, when ye have drawn my mantle o'er my face, my sons. For I am grieved at what hath happened, and yet, were it not fulfilled, we could not live; thus were our fate worse, though this is grief enough.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Without the will of heaven none is blest, none curst, I do maintain; nor doth the same house for ever tread the path of bliss; for one kind of fortune follows hard upon another; one man it brings to naught from his high estate, another though of no account it crowns with happiness. To shun what fate decrees, is no wise permitted; none by cunning shall thrust it from him; but he, who vainly would do so, shall have unceasing trouble.

antistrophe

Then fall not prostrate thou, but bear what heaven sends, and set a limit to thy soul's grief; for she, poor maid! in dying for her brothers

and this land, hath won a glorious death, and splendid fame shall be her meed from all mankind; for virtue's path leads through troublous ways. Worthy of her father, worthy of her noble birth is this she does. And if thou dost honour the virtuous dead, I share with thee that sentiment.

(*The* SERVANT OF HYLLUS *enters.*)

SERVANT OF HYLLUS

All hail, ye children! Where is aged Iolaus? where the mother of your sire, absent from their place at this altar?

IOLAUS

Here am I, so far as I can be here at all.

SERVANT

Why dost thou lie there? Why that downcast look?

IOLAUS

There is come a sorrow on my house, whereby I suffer.

SERVANT

Arise, lift up thy head.

IOLAUS

I am old, and all my strength is gone.

SERVANT

But I come with tidings of great joy for thee.

IOLAUS

Who art thou? Where have I met thee? I have no remembrance.

SERVANT

I am a vassal of Hyllus; dost not recognize me now?

IOLAUS

Best of friends, art thou come to save us twain from hurt?

SERVANT

Assuredly; and moreover thou art lucky in the present case.

IOLAUS

Alcmena, mother of a noble son, to thee I call! come forth, hear this welcome news. For long has anguish caused thee inwardly to waste, wondering if those, who now are here, would ever come.

(ALCMENA *enters from the temple in answer to the call.*)

ALCMENA

What means that shout, that echoes throughout the house? Hath there come yet a herald from Argos, O Iolaus, and is he treating thee with violence? Feeble is any strength of mine; yet thus much let me tell thee, stranger, never, whilst I live, shalt thou drag them hence. Shouldst thou succeed, no more let me be thought the mother of that hero. And if thou lay a finger on them, thou wilt struggle to thy shame with two aged foes.

IOLAUS

Courage, aged dame, fear not; not from Argos is a herald come, with hostile messages.

ALCMENA

Why then didst raise a cry, fear's harbinger?

IOLAUS

I called thee to come to me in front of this temple.

ALCMENA

I know not what it means; who is this?

IOLAUS

A messenger who says thy grandson cometh hither.

ALCMENA

All hail to thee for these thy tidings! But why is he not here, where is he? if in this land he hath set foot. What hath happened to keep him from coming hither with thee, to cheer my heart?

SERVANT

He is posting the army he brought with him, and seeing it marshalled.

ALCMENA

Then have I no concern herein.

IOLAUS

Yes, thou hast; though it is my business to inquire.

SERVANT

What then wouldst thou learn of these events?

IOLAUS

About how many allies has he with him?

SERVANT

A numerous force; I cannot otherwise describe the number.

IOLAUS

The leaders of the Athenians know this, I suppose?

SERVANT

They do; already is their left wing set in array.

IOLAUS

Is then the host already armed for battle?

SERVANT

Yea, and already are the victims brought near the ranks.

IOLAUS

About what distance is the Argive host from us?

SERVANT

Near enough for their general to be plainly seen.

IOLAUS

What is he about? marshalling the enemy's line?

SERVANT

So we guessed; we could not hear exactly. But I must go, for I would not that my master should engage the foe without me, if I can help it.

IOLAUS

I also will go with thee; for I like thee am minded, so it seems, to be there and help my friends.

SERVANT

It least of all becomes thee thus to utter words of folly.

IOLAUS

Far less to shrink from sharing with my friends the stubborn fight.

SERVANT

Mere looks can wound no one, if the arm do naught.

IOLAUS

Why, cannot I smite even through their shields?

SERVANT

Smite perhaps, more likely be smitten thyself.

IOLAUS

No foe will dare to meet me face to face.

SERVANT

Friend, the strength, that erst was thine, is thine no more.

IOLAUS

Well, at any rate, I will fight with as many as ever I did.

SERVANT

Small the weight thou canst throw into the balance for thy friends.

IOLAUS

Detain me not, when I have girded myself for action.

SERVANT

The power to act is thine no more, the will maybe is there.

IOLAUS

Stay here I will not, say what else thou wilt.

SERVANT

How shalt thou show thyself before the troops unarmed?

IOLAUS

There be captured arms within this shrine; these will I use, and, if I live, restore; and, if I am slain, the god will not demand them of me back. Go thou within, and from its peg take down a suit of armour and forthwith bring it to me. To linger thus at home is infamous, while some go fight, and others out of cowardice remain behind.

(*The* SERVANT *goes into the temple.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Not yet hath time laid low thy spirit, 'tis young as ever; but thy body's strength is gone. Why toil to no purpose? 'Twill do thee hurt and benefit our city little. At thy age thou shouldst confess thy error and let impossibilities alone. Thou canst in no way get thy vigour back again.

ALCMENA

What means this mad resolve to leave me with my children undefended here?

IOLAUS

Men must fight; and thou must look to them.

ALCMENA

And what if thou art slain? what safety shall I find?

IOLAUS

Thy son's surviving children will care for thee.

ALCMENA

Suppose *they* meet with some reverse? which Heaven forefend!

IOLAUS

These strangers will not give thee up, fear not.

ALCMENA

They are my last and only hope, I have no other.

IOLAUS

Zeus too, I feel sure, cares for thy sufferings.

ALCMENA

Ah! of Zeus will I never speak ill, but himself doth know whether he is just to me.

(*The* SERVANT *enters from the temple, carrying the arms.*)

SERVANT

Lo! here thou seest a full coat of mail; make haste to case thyself therein; for the strife is nigh, and bitterly doth Ares loathe loiterers; but if thou fear the weight of the armour, go now without it, and in the ranks do on this gear; meantime will I carry it.

IOLAUS

Well said! keep the harness ready to my hand, put a spear within my grasp, and support me on the left side, guiding my steps.

SERVANT

Am I to lead this warrior like a child?

IOLAUS

To save the omen, we must go without stumbling.

SERVANT

Would thy power to act were equal to thy zeal!

IOLAUS

Hasten; I shall feel it grievously, if I am too late for the battle.

SERVANT

'Tis thou who art slow, not I, though thou fanciest thou art doing wonders.

IOLAUS

Dost not mark how swift my steps are hasting?

SERVANT

I mark more seeming than reality in thy haste.

IOLAUS

Thou wilt tell a different tale when thou seest me there.

SERVANT

What shall I see thee do? I wish thee all success, at any rate.

IOLAUS

Thou shalt see me smite some foeman through the shield.

SERVANT

Perhaps, if ever we get there. I have my fears of that.

IOLAUS

Ah! would to Heaven that thou, mine arm, e'en as I remember thee in thy lusty youth, when with Heracles thou didst sack Sparta, couldst so champion me to-day! how I would put Eurystheus to flight! since he is too craven to wait the onslaught. For prosperity carries with it this error too, a reputation for bravery; for we think the prosperous man a master of all knowledge.

(IOLAUS *and the* SERVANT *depart.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O earth, and moon that shines by night, and dazzling radiance of the god, that giveth light to man, bear the tidings to me, shout aloud to heaven for joy, and beside our ruler's throne, and in the shrine of grey-eyed Athene. For my fatherland and home will I soon decide the issue of the strife with the gleaming sword, because I have taken suppliants under my protection.

antistrophe 1

'Tis a fearful thing, that a city prosperous as Mycenae is, one famed for martial prowess, should harbour wrath against my land: still, my countrymen, it were a shameful thing in us to yield up suppliant strangers at the bidding of Argos. Zeus is on my side, I am not afraid; Zeus hath a favour unto me, as is my due; never by me shall gods be thought weaker than mortal men.

strophe 2

O dread goddess, thine the soil whereon we stand, thine this city, for thou art its mother, queen, and saviour; wherefore turn some other way the impious king, who leadeth a host from Argos with brandished lance against this land; for, such my worth, I little merit exile from my home.

antistrophe 2

For thy worship [2] is aye performed with many a sacrifice, and never art thou forgotten as each month draweth to its close, when young voices sing and dancers' music is heard abroad, while on our wind-swept hill goes up the cry of joy to the beat of maidens' feet by night.

(*The* SERVANT *enters.*)

SERVANT

Mistress, the message that I bring is very short for thee to hear and fair for me, who stand before thee, to announce. O'er our foes we are victorious, and trophies are being set up, with panoplies upon them, taken from thy enemies.

ALCMENA

Best of friends! this day hath wrought thy liberty by reason of these tidings. But there still remains one anxious thought thou dost not free me from;—a thought of fear;—are those, whose lives I cherish, spared to me?

SERVANT

They are, and high their fame through all the army spreads.

ALCMENA

The old man Iolaus,—is he yet alive?

SERVANT

Aye, that he is, a hero whom the gods delight to honour.

ALCMENA

How so? Did he perform some deed of prowess?

SERVANT

He hath passed from age to youth once more.

ALCMENA

Thy tale is passing strange; but first I would that thou shouldst tell me how our friends won the day.

SERVANT

One speech of mine puts it all clearly before thee. When we had deployed our troops and marshalled them face to face with one another, Hyllus dismounted from his four-horsed chariot and stood midway betwixt the hosts. Then cried he, "Captain, who art come from Argos, why cannot we leave this land alone? No hurt wilt thou do Mycenae, if of one man thou rob her; come! meet me in single combat, and, if thou slay me,

take the children of Heracles away with thee, but, if thou fall, leave me to possess my ancestral honours and my home." The host cried yes! saying the scheme he offered was a fair one, both to rid them of their trouble and satisfy their valour. But that other, feeling no shame before those who heard the challenge or at his own cowardice, quailed, general though he was, to come within reach of the stubborn spear, showing himself an abject coward; yet with such a spirit he came to enslave the children of Heracles. Then did Hyllus withdraw to his own ranks again, and the prophets seeing that no reconciliation would be effected by single combat, began the sacrifice without delay and forthwith let flow from a human [3] throat auspicious streams of blood. And some were mounting chariots, while others couched beneath the shelter of their shields, and the king of the Athenians, as a highborn chieftain should, would exhort his host: "Fellow-citizens, the land, that feeds you and that gave you birth, demands to-day the help of every man." Likewise Eurystheus besought his allies that they should scorn to sully the fame of Argos and Mycenae. Anon the Etrurian trumpet sounded loud and clear, and hand to hand they rushed; then think how loudly clashed their ringing shields, what din arose of cries and groans confused! At first the onset of the Argive spearmen broke our ranks; then they in turn gave ground; next, foot to foot and man to man, they fought their stubborn fray, many falling the while. And either chief cheered on his men, "Sons of Athens! Ye who till the fields of Argos! ward from your land disgrace." Do all we could, and spite of every effort, scarce could we turn the Argive line in flight. When lo! old Iolaus sees Hyllus starting from the ranks, whereon he lifts his hands to him with a prayer to take him up into his chariot. Thereon he seized the reins and went hard after the horses of Eurystheus. From this point onward must I speak from hearsay, though hitherto as one whose own eyes saw. For as he was crossing Pallene's hill, sacred to the goddess Athene, he caught sight of Eurystheus' chariot, and prayed to Hebe and to Zeus, that for one single day he might grow young again and wreak his vengeance on his foes. Now must thou hear a wondrous tale: two stars settled on the horses' yokes and threw the chariot into dark shadow, which —at least so say our wiser folk—were thy son and Hebe; and from that murky gloom appeared that aged man in the form of a youth with strong young arms; then by the rocks of Sciron the hero Iolaus o'ertakes Eurystheus' chariot. And he bound his hands with gyves, and is bringing that chieftain once so prosperous as a trophy hither, whose fortune now doth preach a lesson, clear as day, to all the sons of men, that none should envy him, who seems to thrive, until they see his death; for fortune's moods last but a day.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O Zeus, who puttest my foes to flight, now may I behold the day that frees me from cruel fear!

ALCMENA

At last, O Zeus, hast thou turned a favouring eye on my affliction; yet do I thank thee for what has happened. And though ere this I did not believe my son was gathered to the gods, now am I convinced thereof. My children, now at last from toil shall ye be free, free from him, whom hideous death awaits, Eurystheus; now shall ye behold your father's city, and set foot in the land of your inheritance, and sacrifice to those ancestral gods, from whom ye have been debarred and forced to lead in strangers' lands a life of wretched vagrancy. But tell me, what sage purpose Iolaus nursed in his heart, that he spared the life of Eurystheus, for to my mind this is no wisdom, to catch a foe and wreak no vengeance on him.

SERVANT

'Twas his regard for thee, that thou might'st see him subject to thy hand, and triumph o'er him. Rest assured, 'twas no willing prisoner he made, but by strong constraint he bound him, for Eurystheus was loth indeed to come alive into thy presence and pay his penalty. Farewell, my aged mistress; I pray thee remember thy first promise when I was beginning my story; set me free; for, at such a time as this, sincerity becometh noble lips.

(*The* SERVANT *departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Sweet is the dance to me, whenso the clear-toned flute and lovely Aphrodite shed grace upon the feast; and a joyful thing too it is, I trow, to witness the good luck of friends, who till then ne'er dreamt of it. For numerous is the offspring of Fate, that bringeth all to pass, and of Time, the son of Cronus.

antistrophe 1

Thine is the path of justice, O my city; this must no man wrest from thee, thy reverence for the gods, and, whoso denieth it of thee, draws nigh to frenzy's goal, with these plain proofs in view. Yea, for the god proclaims it clearly, by cutting short the bad man's pride in every case.

strophe 2

In heaven, mother, lives thy son, passed from earth away; that he went down to Hades' halls, his body burnt by the fire's fierce flame,

is past belief; in golden halls reclined he has to wife Hebe, lovely nymph. Thou, O Hymen, hast honoured them, children both of Zeus.

antistrophe 2

Things for the most part form a single chain; for men say Athene used to champion their father, and now the citizens of that goddess have saved his children, and checked the insolence of him whose heart preferred violence to justice. God save me from such arrogance, such greed of soul!

(*A* MESSENGER *enters. He is followed by guards who bring in* EURYSTHEUS *bound.*)

MESSENGER

Mistress, though thine eyes see him, yet will I announce we have brought Eurystheus hither for thy pleasure, an unexpected sight, for him no less a chance he ne'er foresaw; for little he thought of ever falling into thy hands, what time he marched from Mycenae with his toil-worn warriors, to sack Athens, thinking himself far above fortune. But a power divine hath reversed our destinies, changing their position. Now Hyllus and brave Iolaus I left raising an image to Zeus, who routs the foe, for their triumphant victory, whilst they bid me bring this prisoner to thee, wishing to gladden thy heart; for 'tis the sweetest sight to see a foe fall on evil days after prosperity.

ALCMENA

Art come, thou hateful wretch? Hath Justice caught thee then at last? First, turn thy head this way to me, and endure to look thy enemies in the face, for thou art no more the ruler, but the slave. Art thou the man —for this I fain would learn—who didst presume to heap thy insults on my son, who now is where he is, thou miscreant? What outrage didst thou abstain from putting upon him? Thou that didst make him go down alive even to Hades, and wouldst send him with an order to slay hydras and lions? Thy other evil schemes I mention not, for to tell them were a tedious task for me. Nor did it content thee to venture thus far only; no! but from all Hellas wouldst thou drive me and my children, heaven's suppliants though we were, grey-heads some of us, and some still tender babes. But here hast thou found men and a free city, that feared not thee. Die in torment must thou, and e'en so wilt thou gain in every way, for one death is not thy due, after all the sorrow thou hast caused.

MESSENGER

Thou mayst not slay him.

ALCMENA

Then have we taken him captive in vain. But say, what law forbids his death?

MESSENGER

It is not the will of the rulers of this land.

ALCMENA

Why, what is this? Do they not approve of slaying enemies?

MESSENGER

Not such as they have taken alive in battle.

ALCMENA

Did Hyllus uphold this decision?

MESSENGER

He, I suppose, ought to have disobeyed the law of the land.

ALCMENA

The prisoner's life ought not to have been spared a moment.

MESSENGER

It was then that he was wronged, by not being slain at first.

ALCMENA

Why, then, he is still in time to pay his penalty.

MESSENGER

There is no one who will slay him now.

ALCMENA

I will; and yet I count myself someone.

MESSENGER

Well, thou wilt incur great blame, if thou do this deed.

ALCMENA

I love this city well; that cannot be gainsaid. But since this man hath fallen into my power, no mortal hand shall wrest him from me. Wherefore let who will, call me the woman bold, with thoughts too high for her sex; yet shall this deed be brought to pass by me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lady, full well I understand thou hast a dire quarrel with this man, and 'tis pardonable.

EURYSTHEUS

Woman, be sure I will not flatter thee nor say aught to save my life, that can give any occasion for a charge of cowardice. It was not of my own free will I took this quarrel up; I am aware that I was born thy cousin, and kinsman to Heracles, thy son; but whether I would or no, Hera, by her power divine, caused me to be afflicted thus. Still, when I undertook to be his foe, and when I knew I had to enter on this struggle, I set myself to devise trouble in plenty, and oft from time to time my midnight communing bore fruit, scheming how to push aside and slay my foes, and for the future divorce myself from fear; for I knew that son of thine was no mere cipher, but a man indeed; yea, for, though he was my foe, I will speak well of him, because he was a man of worth. Now, after he was taken hence, was I not forced, by reason of these children's hatred, and because I was conscious of an hereditary feud, to leave no stone unturned by slaying, banishing, and plotting against them? So long as I did so, my safety was assured. Suppose thyself hadst had my lot, wouldst not thou have set to harassing the lion's angry whelps, instead of letting them dwell at Argos undisturbed? Thou wilt not persuade us otherwise. Now therefore, since they did not slay me then, when I was prepared to die, by the laws of Hellas my death becomes a curse on him who slays me now. The city wisely let me go, in that she regarded the gods more than her hatred of me. Thou hast had my answer to thy words; henceforth must I be called avenging spirit and noble hero too. 'Tis even thus with me; to die have I no wish, but, if I leave my life, I shall in no way be grieved.

LEADER

Alcmena, fain I would advise thee somewhat; let this man go, for 'tis the city's will.

ALCMENA

Suppose he die, and yet I obey the city?

LEADER

That would be best of all; but how can this be?

ALCMENA

I will teach thee easily. I will slay him and then give up his corpse to those of his friends who come for it, for, as regards his body, I will not disobey the state; but by his death shall he pay me the penalty.

EURYSTHEUS

Slay me, I do not ask thee for mercy; yet since this city let me go and shrunk from slaying me, I will reward it with an old oracle of Loxias, which in time will benefit them more than doth appear. Bury my body

after death in its destined grave in front of the shrine of the virgin goddess at Pallene. And I will be thy friend and guardian of thy city for ever, where I lie buried in a foreign soil, but a bitter foe to these children's descendants, whensoe'er [4] with gathered host they come against this land, traitors to your kindness now; such are the strangers ye have championed. Why then came I hither, if I knew all this, instead of regarding the god's oracle? Because I thought, that Hera was mightier far than any oracle, and would not betray me. Waste no drink-offering on my tomb, nor spill the victim's blood; for I will requite them for my treatment here with a journey they shall rue; and ye shall have double gain from me, for I will help you and harm them by my death.

ALCMENA

Why, why delay to kill this man, after hearing this, since this is needed to secure the safety of your city and your children? Himself points out the safest road. Though the man is now our foe, yet after death is he our gain. Away with him, ye servants, and cast him [5] to the dogs when ye have slain him. Think not thou shalt live to cast me forth from my native land again.

(*The guards lead out* EURYSTHEUS.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I agree. Lead on, servants. Our conduct shall bring no stain of guilt upon our rulers.

THE translation of Coleridge has been slightly modified in the following lines: 6, 128, 167, 225, 236, 296, 419, 507, 626, 632, 634, 666, 724, 920.

1. This refers to the girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, which Heracles had to procure as one of his labours for Eurystheus.

2. The Chorus is alluding to the festival of the Panathenaea.

3. If the text which Coleridge here has translated is correct, this is possibly a reference to the sacrifice of Macaria.

4. Coleridge points out in a note that Eurystheus is referring to invasions by the Peloponnesians, descendants of the Heracleidae. It might be added that this line is typical of the allusions to contemporary events which are found in the play.

5. This apparent breach of her promise is usually explained by the theory that the play in its present form is incomplete.

VII
THE SUPPLIANTS

Characters in the Play

Aethra, *mother of* Theseus
Chorus of Argive Mothers
Theseus, *King of Athens*
Adrastus, *King of Argos*
Herald, *of Creon, King of Thebes*
Messenger
Evadne, *wife of Capaneus*
Iphis, *father of* Evadne
Children *of the slain chieftains*
Athena
Guards, attendants, soldiers

INTRODUCTION

ARGUING from certain fairly apparent allusions in the play to contemporary events of the Peloponnesian War, scholars have generally concluded that *The Suppliants* was first acted about 420 B.C. Like *The Heracleidae,* the central purpose of the piece seems to be a eulogy of Athens. Euripides here again stresses the glory of the Athenian democratic institutions, her religious piety, and her traditional rôle as a defender of the down-trodden and oppressed. The subject-matter of the play derives from the Theban saga, but presents an aspect of it which is not met elsewhere in the extant Greek tragedy. The dramatic action occurs after the Thebans under Eteocles have successfully repulsed the attack upon their city by the Argives under the leadership of Polyneices and Adrastus. The play assumes a knowledge of the unhappy story of Oedipus and his sons, but it centres primarily upon the defeated Argives and their sorrow for their fallen champions. The suppliants, from whom the play takes its name, are the mothers of these slain champions. The victorious Thebans have refused to allow them to bury their dead, and they have come to Athens in order to enlist the support of King Theseus. The play records how Theseus gave his support, recovered the bodies by defeating the Theban army, and finally made it possible for the due rites of burial to be performed.

As in *The Heracleidae,* the emphasis upon the praise of Athens has caused the play to suffer in respect to its dramatic structure and portrayal of character. No one of the characters seems to be adequately drawn, while the lack of integration between the several scenes gives an "episodic" impression which detracts materially from the effect of the whole. Some of the individual scenes in themselves are not without merit. For example, in the argument between Theseus and the Herald of Creon, there is a most able defence of the political structure of democracy, yet from the point of view of the whole play, one cannot but feel that here is the gratuitous introduction of an essentially extraneous element. Similarly, the scene wherein Evadne leaps upon the pyre of her husband, though somewhat melodramatic, carries with it no inconsiderable emotional power, yet one can scarcely discover an adequate reason for its

presence in the play. Even the final appearance of Athena as a *deus ex machina* does not seem to be demanded by the situation. These unfavorable criticisms are partially offset by the fact that there are certain scenes, such as the spectacular funeral procession of the dead heroes, which do tend to focus the play around the glory of Athens and her devotion to the gods. Such force as the play possesses seems to spring from Euripides' insistence throughout that the will of Heaven is of first importance for the life of man.

THE SUPPLIANTS

(SCENE:—*Before the temple of Demeter at Eleusis. On the steps of the great altar is seated* AETHRA. *Around her, in the garb of suppliants, is the* CHORUS OF ARGIVE MOTHERS. ADRASTUS *lies on the ground before the altar, crushed in abject grief. The* CHILDREN *of the slain chieftains stand nearby. Around the altar are the attendants of the goddess.*)

AETHRA

O DEMETER, guardian of this Eleusinian land, and ye servants of the goddess who attend her fane, grant happiness to me and my son Theseus, to the city of Athens and the country of Pittheus, wherein my father reared me, Aethra, in a happy home, and gave me in marriage to Aegeus, Pandion's son, according to the oracle of Loxias. This prayer I make, when I behold these aged dames, who, leaving their homes in Argos, now throw themselves with suppliant branches at my knees in their awful trouble; for around the gates of Cadmus have they lost their seven noble sons, whom on a day Adrastus, king of Argos, led thither, eager to secure for exiled Polyneices, his son-in-law, a share in the heritage of Oedipus; so now their mothers would bury in the grave the dead, whom the spear hath slain, but the victors prevent them and will not allow them to take up the corpses, spurning Heaven's laws. Here lies Adrastus on the ground with streaming eye, sharing with them the burden of their prayer to me, and bemoaning the havoc of the sword and the sorry fate of the warriors whom he led from their homes. And he doth urge me use entreaty, to persuade my son to take up the dead and help to bury them, either by winning words or force of arms, laying on my son and on Athens this task alone. Now it chanced, that I had left my house and come to offer sacrifice on behalf of the earth's crop at this shrine, where first the fruitful corn showed its bristling shocks above the soil. And here at the holy altars of the twain goddesses, Demeter and her daughter, I wait, holding these sprays of foliage, a bond that bindeth not, in compassion for these childless mothers, hoary with age, and from reverence for the sacred fillets. To call Theseus hither is my herald to the city gone, that he may rid the land of that which grieveth them, or loose these my suppliant bonds, with

pious observance of the gods' will; for such as are discreet amongst women should in all cases invoke the aid of men.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 1

At thy knees I fall, aged dame, and my old lips beseech thee; arise, rescue from the slain my children's bodies, whose limbs, by death relaxed, are left a prey to savage mountain beasts,

antistrophe 1

Beholding the bitter tears which spring to my eyes and my old wrinkled skin torn by my hands; for what can I do else? who never laid out my children dead within my halls, nor now behold their tombs heaped up with earth.

strophe 2

Thou too, honoured lady, once a son didst bear, crowning thy lord's marriage with fond joy; then share, O share with me thy mother's feelings, in such measure as my sad heart grieves for my own dead sons; and persuade thy son, whose aid we implore, to go unto the river Ismenus, there to place within my hapless arms the bodies of my children, slain in their prime and left without a tomb.

antistrophe 2

Though not as piety enjoins, yet from sheer necessity I have come to the fire-crowned altars of the gods, falling on my knees with instant supplication, for my cause is just, and 'tis in thy power, blest as thou art in thy children, to remove from me my woe; so in my sore distress I do beseech thee of my misery place in my hands my son's dead body, that I may throw my arms about his hapless limbs.

(*The attendants of the goddess take up the lament.*)

strophe 3

Behold a rivalry in sorrow! woe takes up the tale of woe; hark! thy servants beat their breasts. Come ye who join the mourners' wail, come, O sympathetic band, to join the dance, which Hades honours; let the pearly nail be stained red, as it rends your cheeks, let your skin be streaked with gore; for honours rendered to the dead are a credit to the living.

antistrophe 3

Sorrow's charm doth drive me wild, insatiate, painful, endless, even as the trickling stream that gushes from some steep rock's face;

for 'tis woman's way to fall a-weeping o'er the cruel calamity of children dead. Ah me! would I could die and forget my anguish!

(THESEUS *and his retinue enter.*)

THESEUS

What is this lamentation that I hear, this beating of the breast, these dirges for the dead, with cries that echo from this shrine? How fluttering fear disquiets me, lest haply my mother have gotten some mischance, in quest of whom I come, for she hath been long absent from home. Ha! what now? A strange sight challenges my speech; I see my aged mother sitting at the altar and stranger dames are with her, who in various note proclaim their woe; from aged eyes the piteous tear is starting to the ground, their hair is shorn, their robes are not the robes of joy. What means it, mother? 'Tis thine to make it plain to me, mine to listen; yea, for I expect some tidings strange.

AETHRA

My son, these are the mothers of those chieftains seven, who fell around the gates of Cadmus' town. With suppliant boughs they keep me prisoner, as thou seest, in their midst.

THESEUS

And who is yonder man, that moaneth piteously in the gateway?

AETHRA

Adrastus, they inform me, king of Argos.

THESEUS

Are those his children, those boys who stand round him?

AETHRA

Not his, but the sons of the fallen slain.

THESEUS

Why are they come to us, with suppliant hand outstretched?

AETHRA

I know; but 'tis for them to tell their story, my son.

THESEUS

To thee, in thy mantle muffled, I address my inquiries; unveil thy head, let lamentation be, and speak; for naught can be achieved save through the utterance of thy tongue.

ADRASTUS (*rising*)

Victorious prince of the Athenian realm, Theseus, to thee and to thy city I, a suppliant, come.

THESEUS

What seekest thou? What need is thine?

ADRASTUS

Dost know how I did lead an expedition to its ruin?

THESEUS

Assuredly; thou didst not pass through Hellas, all in silence.

ADRASTUS

There I lost the pick of Argos' sons.

THESEUS

These are the results of that unhappy war.

ADRASTUS

I went and craved their bodies from Thebes.

THESEUS

Didst thou rely on heralds, Hermes' servants, in order to bury them?

ADRASTUS

I did; and even then their slayers said me nay.

THESEUS

Why, what say they to thy just request?

ADRASTUS

Say! Success makes them forget how to bear their fortune.

THESEUS

Art come to me then for counsel? or wherefore?

ADRASTUS

With the wish that thou, O Theseus, shouldst recover the sons of the Argives.

THESEUS

Where is your Argos now? were its vauntings all in vain?

ADRASTUS

Defeat and ruin are our lot. To thee for aid we come.

THESEUS
Is this thy own private resolve, or the wish of all the city?

ADRASTUS
The sons of Danaus, one and all, implore thee to bury the dead.

THESEUS
Why didst lead thy seven armies against Thebes?

ADRASTUS
To confer that favour on the husbands of my daughters twain.

THESEUS
To which of the Argives didst thou give thy daughters in marriage?

ADRASTUS
I made no match for them with kinsmen of my family.

THESEUS
What! didst give Argive maids to foreign lords?

ADRASTUS
Yea, to Tydeus, and to Polyneices, who was Theban-born.

THESEUS
What induced thee to select this alliance?

ADRASTUS
Dark riddles of Phoebus stole away my judgment.

THESEUS
What said Apollo to determine the maidens' marriage?

ADRASTUS
That I should give my daughters twain to a wild boar and a lion.

THESEUS
How dost thou explain the message of the god?

ADRASTUS
One night came to my door two exiles.

THESEUS
The name of each declare; thou art speaking of both together.

ADRASTUS
They fought together, Tydeus with Polyneices.

THESEUS

Didst thou give thy daughters to them as to wild beasts?

ADRASTUS

Yea, for, as they fought, I likened them to those monsters twain.

THESEUS

Why had they left the borders of their native land and come to thee?

ADRASTUS

Tydeus was exiled for the murder of a kinsman.

THESEUS

Wherefore had the son of Oedipus left Thebes?

ADRASTUS

By reason of his father's curse, not to spill his brother's blood.

THESEUS

Wise no doubt that voluntary exile.

ADRASTUS

But those who stayed at home were for injuring the absent.

THESEUS

What! did brother rob brother of his inheritance?

ADRASTUS

To avenge this I set out; hence my ruin.

THESEUS

Didst consult seers, and gaze into the flame of burnt-offerings?

ADRASTUS

Ah me! thou pressest on the very point wherein I most did fail.

THESEUS

It seems thy going was not favoured by heaven.

ADRASTUS

Worse; I went in spite even of Amphiaraus.

THESEUS

And so heaven lightly turned its face from thee.

ADRASTUS

I was carried away by the clamour of younger men.

THESEUS

Thou didst favour courage instead of discretion.

ADRASTUS

True; and many a general owes defeat to that. O king of Athens, bravest of the sons of Hellas, I blush to throw myself upon the ground and clasp thy knees, I a grey-haired king, blest in days gone by; yet needs must I yield to my misfortunes. I pray thee save the dead; have pity on my sorrows and on these, the mothers of the slain, whom hoary eld finds reft of their sons; yet they endured to journey hither and tread a foreign soil with aged tottering steps, bearing no embassy to Demeter's mysteries; only seeking burial for their dead, which lot should have been theirs, e'en burial by the hands of sons still in their prime. And 'tis wise in the rich to see the poor man's poverty, and in the poor man to turn ambitious eyes toward the rich, that so he may himself indulge a longing for possessions; and they, whom fortune frowns not on, should gaze on misery's presentment; likewise, who maketh songs should take a pleasure in their making; for if it be not so with him, he will in no wise avail to gladden others, if himself have sorrow in his home; nay, 'tis not even right to expect it. Mayhap thou'lt say, "Why pass the land of Pelops o'er, and lay this toil on Athens?" This am I bound to declare. Sparta is cruel, her customs variable; the other states are small and weak. Thy city alone would be able to undertake this labour; for it turns an eye on suffering, and hath in thee a young and gallant king, for want whereof to lead their hosts states ere now have often perished.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I too, Theseus, urge the same plea to thee; have pity on my hard fate.

THESEUS [1]

Full oft have I argued out this subject with others. For there are who say, there is more bad than good in human nature, to the which I hold a contrary view, that good o'er bad predominates in man, for if it were not so, we should not exist. He hath my praise, whoe'er of gods brought us to live by rule from chaos and from brutishness, first by implanting reason, and next by giving us a tongue to declare our thoughts, so as to know the meaning of what is said, bestowing fruitful crops, and drops of rain from heaven to make them grow, wherewith to nourish earth's fruits and to water her lap; and more than this, protection from the wintry storm, and means to ward from us the sun-god's scorching heat; the art of sailing o'er the sea, so that we might exchange with one another whatso our countries lack. And where sight fails us and our knowledge is not sure, the seer foretells by gazing on the flame, by reading signs in folds of entrails, or by divination from the flight of birds. Are we not then too

proud, when heaven hath made such preparation for our life, not to be content therewith? But our presumption seeks to lord it over heaven, and in the pride of our hearts we think we are wiser than the gods. Methinks thou art even of this number, a son of folly, seeing that thou, though obedient to Apollo's oracle in giving thy daughters to strangers, as if gods really existed, yet hast hurt thy house by mingling the stream of its pure line with muddy waters; no! never should the wise man have joined the stock of just and unjust in one, but should have gotten prosperous friends for his family. For the deity, confusing their destinies, doth oft destroy by the sinner's fate him who never sinned nor committed injustice. Thou didst lead all Argos forth to battle, though seers proclaimed the will of heaven, and then in scorn of them and in violent disregard of the gods hast ruined thy city, led away by younger men, such as court distinction, and add war to war unrighteously, destroying their fellow-citizens; one aspires to lead an army; another fain would seize the reins of power and work his wanton will; a third is bent on gain, careless of any ill the people thereby suffer. For there are three ranks of citizens; the rich, a useless set, that ever crave for more; the poor and destitute, fearful folk, that cherish envy more than is right, and shoot out grievous stings against the men who have aught, beguiled as they are by the eloquence of vicious leaders; while the class that is midmost of the three preserveth cities, observing such order as the state ordains. Shall I then become thy ally? What fair pretext should I urge before my countrymen? Depart in peace! For why shouldst thou, having been ill-advised thyself, seek to drag our fortune down?

LEADER

He erred; but with the young men rests this error, while he may well be pardoned.

ADRASTUS

I did not choose thee, king, to judge my affliction, but came to thee to cure it; no! nor if in aught my fortunes prove me wrong, came I to thee to punish or correct them, but to seek thy help. But if thou wilt not, I must be content with thy decision; for how can I help it? Come, aged dames, away! Yet leave behind you here the woven leaves of pale green foliage, calling to witness heaven and earth, Demeter, that fire-bearing goddess, and the sun-god's light, that our prayers to heaven availed us naught.

CHORUS (*singing*) [2]

. . . who was Pelops' son, and we are of the land of Pelops and share with thee the blood of ancestors. What art thou doing? wilt thou betray these suppliant symbols, and banish from thy land these

aged women without the boon they should obtain? Do not so; e'en the wild beast finds a refuge in the rock, the slave in the altars of the gods, and a state when tempest-tossed cowers to its neighbour's shelter; for naught in this life of man is blest unto its end.

Rise, hapless one, from the sacred floor of Persephone; rise, clasp him by the knees and implore him, "O recover the bodies of our dead sons, the children that I lost—ah, woe is me!—beneath the walls of Cadmus' town." Ah me! ah me! Take me by the hand, poor aged sufferer that I am, support and guide and raise me up. By thy beard, kind friend, glory of Hellas, I do beseech thee, as I clasp thy knees and hands in my misery; O pity me as I entreat for my sons with my tale of wretched woe, like some beggar; nor let my sons lie there unburied in the land of Cadmus, glad prey for beasts, whilst thou art in thy prime, I implore thee. See the teardrop tremble in my eye, as thus I throw me at thy knees to win my children burial.

THESEUS

Mother mine, why weepest thou, drawing o'er thine eyes thy veil? Is it because thou didst hear their piteous lamentations? To my own heart it goes. Raise thy silvered head, weep not where thou sittest at the holy altar of Demeter.

AETHRA

Ah woe!

THESEUS

'Tis not for thee their sorrows to lament.

AETHRA

Ye hapless dames!

THESEUS

Thou art not of their company.

AETHRA

May I a scheme declare, my son, that shall add to thy glory and the state's?

THESEUS

Yea, for oft even from women's lips issue wise counsels.

AETHRA

Yet the word, that lurks within my heart, makes me hesitate.

THESEUS

Shame! to hide from friends good counsel.

AETHRA

Nay then, I will not hold my peace to blame myself hereafter for having now kept silence to my shame, nor will I forego my honourable proposal, from the common fear that it is useless for women to give good advice. First, my son, I exhort thee give good heed to heaven's will, lest from slighting it thou suffer shipwreck; for in this one single point thou failest, though well-advised in all else. Further, I would have patiently endured, had it not been my duty to venture somewhat for injured folk; and this, my son, it is that brings thee now thy honour, and causes me no fear to urge that thou shouldst use thy power to make men of violence, who prevent the dead from receiving their meed of burial and funeral rites, perform this bounden duty, and check those who would confound the customs of all Hellas; for this it is that holds men's states together,—strict observance of the laws. And some, no doubt, will say, 'twas cowardice made thee stand aloof in terror, when thou mightest have won for thy city a crown of glory, and, though thou didst encounter a savage swine,[3] labouring for a sorry task, yet when the time came for thee to face the helmet and pointed spear, and do thy best, thou wert found to be a coward. Nay! do not so if thou be son of mine. Dost see how fiercely thy country looks on its revilers when they mock her for want of counsel? Yea, for in her toils she groweth greater. But states, whose policy is dark and cautious, have their sight darkened by their carefulness. My son, wilt thou not go succour the dead and these poor women in their need? I have no fears for thee, starting as thou dost with right upon thy side; and although I see the prosperity of Cadmus' folk, still am I confident they will throw a different die; for the deity reverses all things again.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah! best of friends, right well hast thou pleaded for me and for Adrastus, and hence my joy is doubled.

THESEUS

Mother, the words that I have spoken are his fair deserts, and I have declared my opinion of the counsels that ruined him; yet do I perceive the truth of thy warning to me, that it ill suits my character to shun dangers. For by a long and glorious career have I displayed this my habit among Hellenes, of ever punishing the wicked. Wherefore I cannot refuse toil. For what will spiteful tongues say of me, when thou, my mother, who more than all others fearest for my safety, bidst me undertake this enterprise? Yea, I will go about this business and rescue the dead by words persuasive; or, failing that, the spear forthwith shall decide this issue, nor will heaven grudge me this. But I require the whole city's sanction also, which my mere wish will ensure; still by communicating the proposal to them I shall find the people better disposed. For them I made supreme,

when I set this city free, by giving all an equal vote. So I will take Adrastus as a text for what I have to say and go to their assembly, and when I have won them to these views, I will return hither, after collecting a picked band of young Athenians; and then remaining under arms I will send a message to Creon, begging the bodies of the dead. But do ye, aged ladies, remove from my mother your holy wreaths, that I may take her by the hand and conduct her to the house of Aegeus; for a wretched son is he who rewards not his parents by service; for, when he hath conferred on them the best he hath, he in his turn from his own sons receives all such service as he gave to them.

(AETHRA *leaves the altar and departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O Argos, home of steeds, my native land! ye have heard with your ears these words, the king's pious will toward the gods in the sight of great Pelasgia and throughout Argos.

antistrophe 1

May he reach the goal! yea, and triumph o'er my sorrows, rescuing the gory corpse, the mother's idol and making the land of Inachus his friend by helping her.

strophe 2

For pious toil is a fair ornament to cities, and carries with it a grace that never wastes away. What will the city decide, I wonder? Will it conclude a friendly truce with me, and shall we obtain burial for our sons?

antistrophe 2

Help, O help, city of Pallas, the mother's cause, that so they may not pollute the laws of all mankind. Thou, I know, dost reverence right, and to injustice dealest out defeat, a protection at all times to the afflicted.

(THESEUS *addresses one of his own heralds. As he speaks, the* HERALD *from King Creon of Thebes enters.*)

THESEUS

Forasmuch as with this thy art thou hast ever served the state and me by carrying my proclamations far and wide, so now cross Asopus and the waters of Ismenus, and declare this message to the haughty king of the Cadmeans: "Theseus, thy neighbour, one who well may win the boon he craves, begs as a favour thy permission to bury the dead, winning to thy-

self thereby the love of all the Erechtheidae." And if they will acquiesce, come back again, but if they hearken not, thy second message runneth thus, they may expect my warrior host; for at the sacred fount of Callichorus my army camps in readiness and is being reviewed. Moreover, the city gladly of its own accord undertook this enterprise, when it perceived my wish. Ha! who comes hither to interrupt my speech? A Theban herald, so it seems, though I am not sure thereof. Stay; haply he may save thee thy trouble. For by his coming he meets my purpose half-way.

THEBAN HERALD

Who is the despot of this land? To whom must I announce the message of Creon, who rules o'er the land of Cadmus, since Eteocles was slain by the hand of his brother Polyneices, at the sevenfold gates of Thebes?

THESEUS

Sir stranger, thou hast made a false beginning to thy speech, in seeking here a despot. For this city is not ruled by one man, but is free. The people rule in succession year by year, allowing no preference to wealth, but the poor man shares equally with the rich.

THEBAN HERALD

Thou givest me here an advantage, as it might be in a game of draughts; for the city, whence I come, is ruled by one man only, not by the mob; none there puffs up the citizens with specious words, and for his own advantage twists them this way or that,—one moment dear to them and lavish of his favours, the next a bane to all; and yet by fresh calumnies of others he hides his former failures and escapes punishment. Besides, how shall the people, if it cannot form true judgments, be able rightly to direct the state? Nay, 'tis time, not haste, that affords a better understanding. A poor hind, granted he be not all unschooled, would still be unable from his toil to give his mind to politics. Verily the better sort count it no healthy sign when the worthless man obtains a reputation by beguiling with words the populace, though aforetime he was naught.

THESEUS

This herald is a clever fellow, a dabbler in the art of talk. But since thou hast thus entered the lists with me, listen awhile, for 'twas thou didst challenge a discussion. Naught is more hostile to a city than a despot; [4] where he is, there are first no laws common to all, but one man is tyrant, in whose keeping and in his alone the law resides, and in that case equality is at an end. But when the laws are written down, rich and poor alike have equal justice, and it is open to the weaker to use the same language to the prosperous when he is reviled by him, and the weaker prevails over the stronger if he have justice on his side. Freedom's mark

is also seen in this: "Who hath wholesome counsel to declare unto the state?" And he who chooses to do so gains renown, while he, who hath no wish, remains silent. What greater equality can there be in a city? Again, where the people are absolute rulers of the land, they rejoice in having a reserve of youthful citizens, while a king counts this a hostile element, and strives to slay the leading men, all such as he deems discreet, for he feareth for his power. How then can a city remain stable, where one cuts short all enterprise and mows down the young like meadow-flowers in spring-time? What boots it to acquire wealth and livelihood for children, merely to add to the tyrant's substance by one's toil? Why train up virgin daughters virtuously in our homes to gratify a tyrant's whim, whenso he will, and cause tears to those who rear them? May my life end if ever my children are to be wedded by violence! This bolt I launch in answer to thy words. Now say, why art thou come? what needest thou of this land? Had not thy city sent thee, to thy cost hadst thou come with thy outrageous utterances; for it is the herald's duty to tell the message he is bidden and hie him back in haste. Henceforth let Creon send to my city some other messenger less talkative than thee.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Look you! how insolent the villains are, when Fortune is kind to them, just as if it would be well with them for ever.

THEBAN HERALD

Now will I speak. On these disputed points hold thou this view, but I the contrary. So I and all the people of Cadmus forbid thee to admit Adrastus to this land, but if he is here, drive him forth in disregard of the holy suppliant bough he bears, ere sinks yon blazing sun, and attempt not violently to take up the dead, seeing thou hast naught to do with the city of Argos. And if thou wilt hearken to me, thou shalt bring thy barque of state into port unharmed by the billows; but if not, fierce shall the surge of battle be, that we and our allies shall raise. Take good thought, nor, angered at my words, because forsooth thou rulest thy city with freedom, return a vaunting answer from thy feebler means. Hope is man's curse; many a state hath it involved in strife, by leading them into excessive rage. For whenso the city has to vote on the question of war, no man ever takes his own death into account, but shifts this misfortune on to his neighbour; but if death had been before their eyes when they were giving their votes, Hellas would ne'er have rushed to her doom in mad desire for battle. And yet each man amongst us knows which of the two to prefer, the good or ill, and how much better peace is for mankind than war,—peace, the Muses' chiefest friend, the foe of sorrow, whose joy is in glad throngs of children, and its delight in prosperity. These are the blessings

we cast away and wickedly embark on war, man enslaving his weaker brother, and cities following suit. Now thou art helping our foes even after death, trying to rescue and bury those whom their own acts of insolence have ruined. Verily then it would seem Capaneus was unjustly blasted by the thunderbolt and charred upon the ladder he had raised against our gates, swearing he would sack our town, whether the god would or no; nor should the yawning earth have snatched away the seer,[5] opening wide her mouth to take his chariot and its horses in, nor should the other chieftains be stretched at our gates, their skeletons to atoms crushed 'neath boulders. Either boast thy wit transcendeth that of Zeus, or else allow that gods are right to slay the ungodly. The wise should love their children first, next their parents and country, whose fortunes it behoves them to increase rather than break down. Rashness in a leader, as in a pilot, causeth shipwreck; who knoweth when to be quiet is a wise man. Yea and this too is bravery, even forethought.

LEADER

The punishment Zeus hath inflicted was surely enough; there was no need to heap this wanton insult on us.

ADRASTUS

Abandoned wretch!

THESEUS

Peace, Adrastus! say no more; set not thy words before mine, for 'tis not to thee this fellow is come with his message, but to me, and I must answer him. Thy first assertion will I answer first: I am not aware that Creon is my lord and master, or that his power outweigheth mine, that so he should compel Athens to act on this wise; nay! for then would the tide of time have to flow backward, if we are to be ordered, as he thinks. 'Tis not I who choose this war, seeing that I did not even join these warriors to go unto the land of Cadmus; but still I claim to bury the fallen dead, not injuring any state nor yet introducing murderous strife, but preserving the law of all Hellas. What is not well in this? If ye suffered aught from the Argives—lo! they are dead; ye took a splendid vengeance on your foes and covered them with shame, and now your right is at an end. Let the dead now be buried in the earth, and each element return to the place from whence it came to the body, the breath to the air, the body to the ground; for in no wise did we get it for our own, but to live our life in, and after that its mother earth must take it back again. Dost think 'tis Argos thou art injuring in refusing burial to the dead? Nay! all Hellas shares herein, if a man rob the dead of their due and keep them from the tomb; for, if this law be enacted, it will strike dismay into the stoutest hearts. And art thou come to cast dire threats at me, while thy

own folk are afraid of giving burial to the dead? What is your fear? Think you they will undermine your land in their graves, or that they will beget children in the womb of earth, from whom shall rise an avenger? A silly waste of words, in truth it was, to show your fear of paltry goundless terrors. Go, triflers, learn the lesson of human misery; our life is made up of struggles; some men there be that find their fortune soon, others have to wait, while some at once are blest. Fortune lives a dainty life; to her the wretched pays his court and homage to win her smile; her likewise doth the prosperous man extol, for fear the favouring gale may leave him. These lessons should we take to heart, to bear with moderation, free from wrath, our wrongs, and do naught to hurt a whole city. What then? Let us, who will the pious deed perform, bury the corpses of the slain. Else is the issue clear; I will go and bury them by force. For never shall it be proclaimed through Hellas that heaven's ancient law was set at naught, when it devolved on me and the city of Pandion.

LEADER

Be of good cheer; for if thou preserve the light of justice, thou shalt escape many a charge that men might urge.

THEBAN HERALD

Wilt thou that I sum up in brief all thou wouldst say?

THESEUS

Say what thou wilt; for thou art not silent as it is.

THEBAN HERALD

Thou shalt never take the sons of Argos from our land.

THESEUS

Hear, then, my answer too to that, if so thou wilt.

THEBAN HERALD

I will hear thee; not that I wish it, but I must give thee thy turn.

THESEUS

I will bury the dead, when from Asopus' land I have removed them.

THEBAN HERALD

First must thou adventure somewhat in the front of war.

THESEUS

Many an enterprise and of a different kind have I ere this endured.

THEBAN HERALD

Wert thou then begotten of thy sire to cope with every foe?

THESEUS

Ay, with all wanton villains; virtue I punish not.

THEBAN HERALD

To meddle is aye thy wont and thy city's too.

THESEUS

Hence her enterprise on many a field hath won her many blessings.

THEBAN HERALD

Come then, that the warriors of the dragon-crop may catch thee in our city.

THESEUS

What furious warrior-host could spring from dragon's seed?

THEBAN HERALD

Thou shalt learn that to thy cost. As yet thou art young and rash.

THESEUS

Thy boastful speech stirs not my heart at all to rage. Yet get thee gone from my land, taking with thee the idle words thou broughtest; for we are making no advance. (*The* THEBAN HERALD *withdraws.*) 'Tis time for all to start, each stout footman, and whoso mounts the car; 'tis time the bit, dripping with foam, should urge the charger on toward the land of Cadmus. For I will march in person to the seven gates thereof with the sharp sword in my hand, and be myself my herald. But thee, Adrastus, I bid stay, nor blend with mine thy fortunes, for I will take my own good star to lead my host, a chieftain famed in famous deeds of arms. One thing alone I need, the favour of all gods that reverence right, for the presence of these things insures victory. For their valour availeth men naught, unless they have the god's goodwill.

(THESEUS *and his retinue depart. The following lines between the* SEMI-CHORUSES *are chanted responsively.*)

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Unhappy mothers of those hapless chiefs! How wildly in my heart pale fear stirs up alarm!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

What is this new cry thou utterest?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

I fear the issue of the strife, whereto the hosts of Pallas march.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Dost speak of issues of the sword, or interchange of words?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

That last were gain indeed; but if the carnage of battle, fighting, and the noise of beaten breasts again be heard in the land, what, alas! will be said of me, who am the cause thereof?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Yet may fate again bring low the brilliant victor; 'tis this brave thought that twines about my heart.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Thou speak'st of the gods as if they were just.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

For who but they allot whate'er betides?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

I see much at variance in their dealings with men.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

The former fear hath warped thy judgment. Vengeance calls vengeance forth; slaughter calls for slaughter, but the gods give respite from affliction, holding in their own hands each thing's allotted end.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Would I could reach yon plains with turrets crowned, leaving Callichorus, fountain of the goddess!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

O that some god would give me wings to fly to the city of rivers twain!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

So might'st thou see and know the fortunes of thy friends.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

What fate, what issue there awaits the valiant monarch of this land?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Once more do we invoke the gods we called upon before; yea, in our fear this is our first and chiefest trust.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

O Zeus, father to the child the heifer-mother bore in days long past, that daughter of Inachus!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

O be gracious, I pray, and champion this city!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

'Tis thy own darling, thy own settler in the city of Argos that I am striving from outrage to rescue for the funeral pyre.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Ladies, I bring you tidings of great joy, myself escaped—for I was taken prisoner in the battle which cost those chieftains seven their lives near Dirce's fount—to bear the news of Theseus' victory. But I will save thee tedious questioning; I was the servant of Capaneus, whom Zeus with scorching bolt to ashes burnt.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Friend of friends, fair thy news of thy own return, nor less the news about Theseus; and if the host of Athens, too, is safe, welcome will all thy message be.

MESSENGER

'Tis safe, and all hath happened as I would it had befallen Adrastus and his Argives, whom from Inachus he led, to march against the city of the Cadmeans.

LEADER

How did the son of Aegeus and his fellow-warriors raise their trophy to Zeus? Tell us, for thou wert there and canst gladden us who were not.

MESSENGER

Bright shone the sun, one levelled line of light, upon the world, as by Electra's gate I stood to watch, from a turret with a far outlook. And lo! I saw the host in three divisions, deploying its mail-clad warriors on the high ground by the banks of Ismenus; this last I heard; and with them was the king himself, famous son of Aegeus; his own men, natives of old Cecropia, were ranged upon the right; while on the left, hard by the fountain of Ares, were the dwellers by the sea, harnessed spearmen they; on either wing were posted cavalry, in equal numbers, and chariots were stationed in the shelter of Amphion's holy tomb. Meantime, the folk of Cadmus set themselves before the walls, placing in the rear the bodies for which they fought. Horse to horse, and car to car stood ranged. Then did the herald of Theseus cry aloud to all: "Be still, ye folk! hush, ye ranks of Cadmus, hearken! we are come to fetch the bodies of the slain, wishing to bury them in observance of the universal law of Hellas; no

wish have we to lengthen out the slaughter." Not a word would Creon let his herald answer back, but there he stood in silence under arms. Then did the drivers of the four-horse cars begin the fray; on, past each other they drave their chariots, bringing the warriors at their sides up into line. Some fought with swords, some wheeled the horses back to the fray again for those they drove. Now when Phorbas, who captained the cavalry of the Erechtheidae, saw the thronging chariots, he and they who had the charge of the Theban horse met hand to hand, and by turns were victors and vanquished. The many horrors happening there I saw, not merely heard about, for I was at the spot where the chariots and their riders met and fought, but which to tell of first I know not,—the clouds of dust that mounted to the sky, the warriors tangled in the reins and dragged this way and that, the streams of crimson gore, when men fell dead, or when, from shattered chariot-seats, they tumbled headlong to the ground, and, mid the splinters of their cars, gave up the ghost. But Creon, when he marked our cavalry's success on one wing, caught up a shield and rushed into the fray, ere that despondency should seize his men; but not for that did Theseus recoil in fear; no! snatching up at once his glittering harness he hied him on. And the twain, clashing their shields together as they met in the midst of the assembled host, were dealing death and courting it, shouting loudly each to his fellow the battle-cry: "Slay, and with thy spear strike home against the sons of Erechtheus." Fierce foes to cope with were the warriors whom the dragon's teeth to manhood reared; so fierce, they broke our left wing, albeit theirs was routed by our right and put to flight, so that the struggle was evenly balanced. Here again our chief deserved all praise, for this success was not the only one he gained; no! next he sought that part of his army which was wavering; and loud he called to them, that the earth rang again, "My sons, if ye cannot restrain the earth-born warriors' stubborn spear, the cause of Pallas is lost." His word inspired new courage in all the Danaid host. Therewith himself did seize a fearsome mace, weapon of Epidaurian warfare, and swung it to and fro, and with that club, as with a sickle, he shore off necks and heads and helmets thereupon. Scarce even then they turned themselves to fly. I cried aloud for joy, and danced and clapped my hands; while to the gates they ran. Throughout the town echoed the shrieks of young and old, as they crowded the temples in terror. But Theseus, when he might have come inside the walls, held back his men, for he had not come, said he, to sack the town, but to ask for the bodies of the dead. Such the general men should choose, one who shows his bravery in danger, yet hates the pride of those that in their hour of fortune lose the bliss they might have enjoyed, through seeking to scale the ladder's topmost step.

LEADER

Now do I believe in the gods after seeing this unexpected day, and I feel my woes are lighter now that these have paid their penalty.

ADRASTUS

O Zeus, why do men assert the wisdom of the wretched human race? On thee we all depend, and all we do is only what thou listest. We thought our Argos irresistible, ourselves a young and lusty host, and so when Eteocles was for making terms, in spite of his fair offer we would not accept them, and so we perished. Then in their turn those foolish folk of Cadmus, to fortune raised, like some beggar with his newly-gotten wealth, waxed wanton, and, waxing so, were ruined in their turn. Ye foolish sons of men! who strain your bow like men who shoot beyond their mark, and only by suffering many evils as ye deserve, though deaf to friends, yet yield to circumstances; ye cities likewise, though ye might by parley end your ills, yet ye choose the sword instead of reason to settle all disputes. But wherefore these reflections? This I fain would learn, the way thou didst escape; and after that I will ask thee of the rest.

MESSENGER

During the uproar which prevailed in the city owing to the battle, I passed the gates, just as the host had entered them.

ADRASTUS

Are ye bringing the bodies, for the which the strife arose?

MESSENGER

Ay, each of the seven chiefs who led their famous hosts.

ADRASTUS

What sayest thou? the rest who fell—say, where are they?

MESSENGER

They have found burial in the dells of Cithaeron.

ADRASTUS

On this or that side of the mount? And who did bury them?

MESSENGER

Theseus buried them 'neath the shadow of Eleutherae's cliff.

ADRASTUS

Where didst thou leave the dead he hath not buried?

MESSENGER

Not far away; earnest haste makes every goal look close.

ADRASTUS

No doubt in sorrow slaves would gather them from the carnage.

MESSENGER

Slaves! not one of them was set to do this toil.

[*A speech belonging to* ADRASTUS *has been lost.*]

MESSENGER

Thou wouldst say so, hadst thou been there to see his loving tendance of the dead.

ADRASTUS

Did he himself wash the bloody wounds of the hapless youths?

MESSENGER

Ay, and strewed their biers and wrapped them in their shrouds.

ADRASTUS

An awful burden this, involving some disgrace.

MESSENGER

Why, what disgrace to men are their fellows' sorrows?

ADRASTUS

Ah me! how much rather had I died with them!

MESSENGER

'Tis vain to weep and move to tears these women.

ADRASTUS

Methinks 'tis they who give the lesson. Enough of that! My hands I lift at meeting of the dead, and pour forth a tearful dirge to Hades, calling on my friends, whose loss I mourn in wretched solitude; for this one thing, when once 'tis spent, man cannot recover, the breath of life, though he knoweth ways to get his wealth again.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Joy is here and sorrow too,—for the state fair fame, and for our captains double meed of honour. Bitter for me it is to see the limbs of my dead sons, and yet a welcome sight withal, because I shall behold the unexpected day after sorrow's cup was full.

antistrophe

Would that Father Time had kept me unwed from my youth up e'en till now when I am old! What need had I of children? Methinks

I should not have suffered overmuch, had I never borne the marriage-yoke; but now I have my sorrow full in view, the loss of children dear.

Lo! I see the bodies of the fallen youths. Woe is me! would I could join these children in their death and descend to Hades with them!

(THESEUS *and his soldiers enter, carrying the corpses of the slain chieftains.* ADRASTUS *and the* CHORUS *chant the lament responsively.*)

ADRASTUS

Mothers, raise the wail for the dead departed; cry in answer when ye hear my note of woe.

CHORUS

My sons, my sons! O bitter words for loving mothers to address to you! To thee, my lifeless child, I call.

ADRASTUS

Woe! woe!

CHORUS

Ah me, my sufferings!

ADRASTUS

Alas! We have endured, alas!—

CHORUS

Sorrows most grievous.

ADRASTUS

O citizens of Argos! do ye not behold my fate?

CHORUS

They see thee, and me the hapless mother, reft of her children.

ADRASTUS

Bring near the blood-boltered corpses of those hapless chiefs, foully slain by foes unworthy, with whom lay the decision of the contest.

CHORUS

Let me embrace and hold my children to my bosom in my enfolding arms.

ADRASTUS

There, there! thou hast—

CHORUS

Sorrows heavy enough to bear.

ADRASTUS

Ah me!

CHORUS

Thy groans mingle with those of their parents.

ADRASTUS

Hear me.

CHORUS

O'er both of us thou dost lament.

ADRASTUS

Would God the Theban ranks had laid me dead in the dust!

CHORUS

Oh that I had ne'er been wedded to a husband!

ADRASTUS

Ah! hapless mothers, behold this sea of troubles!

CHORUS

Our nails have ploughed our cheeks in furrows, and o'er our heads have we strewn ashes.

ADRASTUS

Ah me! ah me! Oh that earth's floor would swallow me, or the whirlwind snatch me away, or Zeus's flaming bolt descend upon my head!

CHORUS

Bitter the marriages thou didst witness, bitter the oracle of Phoebus! The curse of Oedipus, fraught with sorrow, after desolating his house, is come on thee.

THESEUS

I meant to question thee when thou wert venting thy lamentations to the host, but I will let it pass; yet, though I dropped the matter then and left it alone, I now do ask Adrastus, "Of what lineage sprang those youths, to shine so bright in chivalry?" Tell it to our younger citizens of thy fuller wisdom, for thou art skilled to know. Myself beheld their daring deeds,

too high for words to telĕ, whereby they thought to capture Thebes. One question will I spare thee, lest I provoke thy laughter; the foe that each of them encountered in the fray, the spear from which each received his death-wound. These be idle tales alike for those who hear or him who speaks, that any man amid the fray, when clouds of darts are hurtling before his eyes, should declare for certain who each champion is. I could not ask such questions, nor yet believe those who dare assert the like; for when a man is face to face with the foe, he scarce can see even that which 'tis his bounden duty to observe.

ADRASTUS

Hearken then. For in giving this task to me thou findest a willing eulogist of friends, whose praise I would declare in all truth and sincerity. Dost see yon corpse by Zeus's bolt transfixed? That is Capaneus; though he had ample wealth, yet was he the last to boast of his prosperity; nor would he ever vaunt himself above a poorer neighbour, but shunned the man whose sumptuous board had puffed him up too high and made him scorn mere competence, for he held that virtue lies not in greedy gluttony, but that moderate means suffice. True friend was he, alike to present or to absent friends the same; of such the number is not great. His was a guileless character, a courteous address, that left no promise unperformed either towards his own household or his fellow-citizens. The next I name is Eteoclus; a master he of other kinds of excellence; young, nor richly dowered with store, yet high in honour in the Argive land. And though his friends oft offered gifts of gold, he would not have it in his house, to make his character its slave by taking wealth's yoke upon him. Not his city, but those that sinned against her did he hate, for a city is no wise to be blamed if it get an evil name by reason of an evil governor. Such another was Hippomedon, third of all this band; from his very boyhood he refrained from turning towards the allurements of the Muses, to lead a life of ease; his home was in the fields, and gladly would he school his nature to hardships with a view to manliness, aye hasting to the chase, rejoicing in his steeds or straining of his bow, because he would make himself of use unto his state. Next behold the huntress Atalanta's son, Parthenopaeus, a youth of peerless beauty; from Arcady he came even to the streams of Inachus, and in Argos spent his boyhood. There, when he grew to man's estate, first, as is the duty of strangers settled in another land, he showed no pique or jealousy against the state, became no quibbler, chiefest source of annoyance citizen or stranger can give, but took his stand amid the host, and fought for Argos as he were her own son, glad at heart whenso the city prospered, deeply grieved if e'er reverses came; many a lover though he had midst men and maids, yet was he careful to avoid offence. Of Tydeus next the lofty praise I will express in brief; no

brilliant spokesman he, but a clever craftsman in the art of war, with many a shrewd device; inferior in judgment to his brother Meleager, yet through his warrior skill lending his name to equal praise, for he had found in arms a perfect science; his was an ambitious nature, a spirit rich in store of deeds, with words less fully dowered. From this account then wonder not, Theseus, that they dared to die before the towers; for noble nurture carries honour with it, and every man, when once he hath practised virtue, scorns the name of villain. Courage may be learnt, for even a babe doth learn to speak and hear things it cannot comprehend; and whatso'er a child hath learnt, this it is his wont to treasure up till he is old. So train up your children in a virtuous way.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Alas! my son, to sorrow I bare thee and carried thee within my womb, enduring the pangs of travail; but now Hades takes the fruit of all my hapless toil, and I that had a son am left, ah me! with none to nurse my age.

THESEUS

As for the noble son of Oecleus, him, while yet he lived, the gods snatched hence to the bowels of the earth, and his chariot too, manifestly blessing him; while I myself may truthfully tell the praises of the son of Oedipus, that is, Polyneices, for he was my guest-friend ere he left the town of Cadmus and crossed to Argos in voluntary exile. But dost thou know what I would have thee do in this?

ADRASTUS

I know naught save this,—to yield obedience to thy hests.

THESEUS

As for yon Capaneus, stricken by the bolt of Zeus—

ADRASTUS

Wilt bury him apart as a consecrated corpse?

THESEUS

Even so; but all the rest on one funeral pyre.

ADRASTUS

Where wilt thou set the tomb apart for him?

THESEUS

Here near this temple have I builded him a sepulchre.

ADRASTUS

Thy thralls forthwith must undertake this toil.

THESEUS

Myself will look to those others; let the biers advance.

ADRASTUS

Approach your sons, unhappy mothers.

THESEUS

This thy proposal, Adrastus, is anything but good.

ADRASTUS

Must not the mothers touch their sons?

THESEUS

It would kill them to see how they are altered.

ADRASTUS

'Tis bitter, truly, to see the dead even at the moment of death.

THESEUS

Why then wilt thou add fresh grief to them?

ADRASTUS

Thou art right. Ye needs must patiently abide, for the words of Theseus are good. But when we have committed them unto the flames, ye shall collect their bones. O wretched sons of men! Why do ye get you weapons and bring slaughter on one another? Cease therefrom, give o'er your toiling, and in mutual peace keep safe your cities. Short is the span of life, so 'twere best to run its course as lightly as we may, from trouble free.

(*The corpses, followed by the* CHILDREN *of the slain chieftains, are carried off to the pyre which is kindled within the sight of the persons on the stage.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

No more a happy mother I, with children blest; no more I share, among Argive women, who have sons, their happy lot; nor any more will Artemis in the hour of travail kindly greet these childless mothers. Most dreary is my life, and like some wandering cloud I drift before the howling blast.

antistrophe

The seven noblest sons in Argos once we had, we seven hapless mothers; but now my sons are dead, I have no child, and on me steals old age in piteous wise, nor 'mongst the dead nor 'mongst the living do I count myself, having as it were a lot apart from these.

epode

Tears alone are left me; in my house sad memories of my son are stored; mournful tresses shorn from his head, chaplets that he wore, libations for the dead departed, and songs, but not such as golden-haired Apollo welcometh; and when I wake to weep, my tears will ever drench the folds of my robe upon my bosom. Ah! there I see the sepulchre ready e'en now for Capaneus, his consecrated tomb, and the votive offerings Theseus gives unto the dead outside the shrine, and nigh yon lightning-smitten chief I see his noble bride, Evadne, daughter of King Iphis. Wherefore stands she on the towering rock, which o'ertops this temple, advancing along yon path?

(EVADNE *is seen on a rock which overhangs the burning pyre. She is dressed as though for a festival.*)

EVADNE (*chanting*)

What light, what radiancy did the sun-god's car dart forth, and the moon athwart the firmament, while round her in the gloom swift stars careered, in the day that the city of Argos raised the stately chant of joy at my wedding, in honour of my marriage with mail-clad Capaneus? Now from my home in frantic haste with frenzied mind I rush to join thee, seeking to share with thee the fire's bright flame and the self-same tomb, to rid me of my weary life in Hades' halls, and of the pains of life; yea, for 'tis the sweetest end to share the death of those we love, if only fate will sanction it.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Behold yon pyre, which thou art overlooking, nigh thereto, set apart for Zeus! There is thy husband's body, vanquished by the blazing bolt.

EVADNE (*chanting*)

Life's goal I now behold from my station here; may fortune aid me in my headlong leap from this rock in honour's cause, down into the fire below, to mix my ashes in the ruddy blaze with my husband's, to lay me side by side with him, there in the couch of Persephone; for ne'er will I, to save my life, prove untrue to thee where thou liest in thy grave. Away with life and marriage too! Oh! may my children live to see the dawn of a fairer, happier wedding-day in Argos! May loyalty inspire the husband's heart, his nature fusing with his wife's!

LEADER

Lo! the aged Iphis, thy father, draweth nigh to hear thy startling speech, which yet he knows not and will grieve to learn.

(IPHIS *enters.*)

IPHIS

Unhappy child! lo! I am come, a poor old man, with twofold sorrow in my house to mourn, that I may carry to his native land the corpse of my son Eteoclus, slain by the Theban spear, and further in quest of my daughter who rushed headlong from the house, for she was the wife of Capaneus and longed with him to die. Ere this she was well guarded in my house, but, when I took the watch away in the present troubles, she escaped. But I feel sure that she is here; tell me if ye have seen her.

EVADNE

Why question them? Lo, here upon the rock, father, o'er the pyre of Capaneus, like some bird I hover lightly, in my wretchedness.

IPHIS

What wind hath blown thee hither, child? Whither thy journey? Why didst thou pass the threshold of my house and seek this land?

EVADNE

It would but anger thee to hear what I intend, and so I fain would keep thee ignorant, my father.

IPHIS

What! hath not thy own father a right to know?

EVADNE

Thou wouldst not wisely judge my purpose.

IPHIS

Why dost thou deck thyself in that apparel?

EVADNE

A purport strange this robe conveys, father.

IPHIS

Thou hast no look of mourning for thy lord.

EVADNE

No, the reason why I thus am decked is strange, maybe.

IPHIS

Dost thou in such garb appear before a funeral-pyre?

EVADNE

Yea, for hither it is I come to take the meed of victory.

IPHIS

"Victory!" What victory? This would I learn of thee.

EVADNE

A victory o'er all women on whom the sun looks down.

IPHIS

In Athena's handiwork or in prudent counsel?

EVADNE

In bravery; for I will lay me down and die with my lord.

IPHIS

What dost thou say? What is this silly riddle thou propoundest?

EVADNE

To yonder pyre where lies dead Capaneus, I will leap down.

IPHIS

My daughter, speak not thus before the multitude!

EVADNE

The very thing I wish, that every Argive should learn it.

IPHIS

Nay, I will ne'er consent to let thee do this deed.

EVADNE

'Tis all one; thou shalt never catch me in thy grasp. Lo! I cast me down, no joy to thee, but to myself and to my husband blazing on the pyre with me.

(*She leaps into the pyre.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O lady, thou hast done a fearful deed!

IPHIS

Ah me! I am undone, ye dames of Argos!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Alack, alack! a cruel blow is this to thee, but thou must yet witness, poor wretch, the full horror of this deed.

IPHIS

A more unhappy wretch than me ye could not find.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe for thee, unhappy man! Thou, old sir, hast been made partaker in the fortune of Oedipus, thou and my poor city too.

IPHIS

Ah, why are mortal men denied this boon, to live their youth twice o'er, and twice in turn to reach old age? If aught goes wrong within our homes, we set it right by judgment more maturely formed, but our life we may not so correct. Now if we had a second spell of youth and age, this double term of life would let us then correct each previous slip. For I, seeing others blest with children, longed to have them too, and found my ruin in that wish. Whereas if I had had my present experience, and by a father's light had learnt how cruel a thing it is to be bereft of children, never should I have fallen on such evil days as these,—I who did beget a brave young son, proud parent that I was, and after all am now bereft of him. Enough of this. What remains for such a hapless wretch as me? Shall I to my home, there to see its utter desolation and the blank within my life? or shall I to the halls of that dead Capaneus?—halls I smiled to see in days gone by, when yet my daughter was alive. But she is lost and gone, she that would ever draw down my cheek to her lips, and take my head between her hands; for naught is there more sweet unto an aged sire than a daughter's love; our sons are made of sterner stuff, but less winning are their caresses. Oh! take me to my house at once, in darkness hide me there, to waste and fret this aged frame with fasting! What shall it avail me to touch my daughter's bones? Old age, resistless foe, how do I loathe thy presence! Them too I hate, whoso desire to lengthen out the span of life, seeking to turn the tide of death aside by philtres, drugs, and magic spells, —folk that death should take away to leave the young their place, when they no more can benefit the world.

(IPHIS *departs. A procession enters from the direction of the pyre, led by the* CHILDREN *of the slain chieftains, who carry the ashes of their fathers in funeral urns. The following lines between the* CHORUS *and the* CHILDREN *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

Woe, woe! Behold your dead sons' bones are brought hither; take them, servants of your weak old mistress, for in me is no strength left by reason of my mourning for my sons; time's comrade long have I been, and many a tear for many a sorrow have I shed. For what sharper pang wilt thou ever find for mortals than the sight of children dead?

CHILDREN

Poor mother mine, behold I bring my father's bones gathered from the fire, a burden grief has rendered heavy, though this tiny urn contains my all.

CHORUS

Ah me! ah me! Why bear thy tearful load to the fond mother of the dead, a handful of ashes in the stead of those who erst were men of mark in Mycenae?

CHILDREN

Woe worth the hour! woe worth the day! Reft of my hapless sire, a wretched orphan shall I inherit a desolate house, torn from my father's arms.

CHORUS

Woe is thee! Where is now the toil I spent upon my sons? what thank have I for nightly watch? Where the mother's nursing care? the sleepless vigils mine eyes have kept? the loving kiss upon my children's brow?

CHILDREN

Thy sons are dead and gone. Poor mother! dead and gone; the boundless air now wraps them round.

CHORUS

Turned to ashes by the flame, they have winged their flight to Hades.

CHILDREN

Father, thou hearest thy children's lamentation; say, shall I e'er, as warrior dight, avenge thy slaughter?

CHORUS

God grant it, O my child!

CHILDREN

Some day, if god so will, shall the avenging of my father be my task; not yet this sorrow sleeps.

CHORUS

Alas! Fortune's sorrows are enough for me, I have enough of troubles now.

CHILDREN

Shall Asopus' laughing tide ever reflect my brazen arms as I lead on my Argive troops?

CHORUS

To avenge thy fallen sire.

CHILDREN

Methinks I see thee still before my eyes, my father—

CHORUS

Printing a loving kiss upon thy cheek.

CHILDREN

But thy words of exhortation are borne on the winds away.

CHORUS

Two mourners hath he left behind, thy mother and thee, bequeathing to thee an endless legacy of grief for thy father.

CHILDREN

The weight of grief I have to bear hath crushed me utterly.

CHORUS

Come, let me clasp the ashes of my son to my bosom.

CHILDREN

I weep to hear that piteous word; it stabs me to the heart.

CHORUS

My child, thou art undone; no more shall I behold thee, thy own fond mother's treasure.

THESEUS

Adrastus, and ye dames from Argos sprung, ye see these children bearing in their hands the bodies of their valiant sires whom I redeemed; to thee I give these gifts, I and Athens. And ye must bear in mind the memory of this favour, marking well the treatment ye have had of me. And to these children I repeat the self-same words, that they may honour this city, to children's children ever handing on the kindness ye received from us. Be Zeus the witness, with the gods in heaven, of the treatment we vouchsafed you ere you left us.

ADRASTUS

Theseus, well we know all the kindness thou hast conferred upon the land of Argos in her need, and ours shall be a gratitude that never waxeth old, for your generous treatment makes us debtors for a like return.

THESEUS

What yet remains, wherein I can serve you?

ADRASTUS

Fare thee well, for such is thy desert and such thy city's too.

THESEUS

Even so. Mayst thou too have the self-same fortune!

(ATHENA *appears from above.*)

ATHENA

Hearken, Theseus, to the words that I Athena utter, telling thee thy duty, which, if thou perform it, will serve thy city. Give not these bones to the children to carry to the land of Argos, letting them go so lightly; nay, take first an oath of them that they will requite thee and thy city for your efforts. This oath must Adrastus swear, for as their king it is his right to take the oath for the whole realm of Argos. And this shall be the form thereof: "We Argives swear we never will against this land lead on our mail-clad troops to war, and, if others come, we will repel them." But if they violate their oath and come against the city, pray that the land of Argos may be miserably destroyed. Now hearken while I tell thee where thou must slay the victims. Thou hast within thy halls a tripod with brazen feet, which Heracles, in days gone by, after he had o'erthrown the foundations of Ilium and was starting on another enterprise, enjoined thee to set up at the Pythian shrine. O'er it cut the throats of three sheep; then grave within the tripod's hollow belly the oath; this done, deliver it to the god who watches over Delphi to keep, a witness and memorial unto Hellas of the oath. And bury the sharp-edged knife, wherewith thou shalt have laid the victims open and shed their blood, deep in the bowels of the earth, hard by the pyres where the seven chieftains burn; for its appearance shall strike them with dismay, if e'er against thy town they come, and shall cause them to return with sorrow. When thou hast done all this, dismiss the dead from thy land. And to the god resign as sacred land the spot where their bodies were purified by fire, there by the meeting of the triple roads that lead unto the Isthmus. Thus much to thee, Theseus, I address; next to the sons of Argos I speak; when ye are grown to men's estate, the town beside Ismenus shall ye sack, avenging the slaughter of your dead sires; thou too, Aegialeus, shalt take thy father's place and in thy youth command the host, and with thee Tydeus' son marching from Aetolia,—him whom his father named Diomedes. Soon as the beards your cheeks o'ershadow must ye lead an armed Danaid host against the battlements of Thebes with sevenfold gates. For to their sorrow shall ye come like lion's whelps in full-grown might to sack their city. No otherwise is it to be; and ye shall be a theme for minstrels' songs in days to come, known through Hellas as "the After-born"; so famous shall your expedition be, thanks to Heaven.

THESEUS

Queen Athena, I will hearken to thy bidding; for thou it is dost set me up, so that I go not astray. And I will bind this monarch by an oath; do

thou but guide my steps aright. For if thou art friendly to our state, we shall henceforth live secure.

(ATHENA *vanishes.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Let us go, Adrastus, and take the oath to this monarch and his state; for the service they have already done us claims our reverence.

THE translation of Coleridge has been slightly modified in the following lines: 178, 237, 430, 521, 577, 612, 632, 708, 719, 748, 791, 932, 1005, 1032, 1048, 1053, 1087, 1149, 1234.

1. The first portion of this speech calls to mind Prometheus' account of his benefits to man in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound,* as well as Sophocles' famous chorus on man in the *Antigone.*

2. Some words seem to have been lost at the beginning of this choral ode.

3. This refers to the monster Phaea, which infested the neighbourhood of Corinth.

4. This passage may be compared with Plato's description of tyranny and the tyrant in the *Republic,* Books VIII and IX.

5. *i.e.,* Amphiaraus.

VIII
THE TROJAN WOMEN

Characters in the Play

The God Poseidon
The Goddess Pallas Athena
Hecuba, *Queen of Troy, wife of Priam, mother of Hector and Paris*
Cassandra, *daughter of Hecuba, a prophetess*
Andromache, *wife of Hector, Prince of Troy*
Helen, *wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta; carried off by Paris, Prince of Troy*
Talthybius, *Herald of the Greeks*
Menelaus, *King of Sparta, and, together with his brother Agamemnon, General of the Greeks*
Soldiers attendant on Talthybius and Menelaus
Chorus of Captive Trojan Women, young and old, maiden and married

INTRODUCTION

WHEN any one reads the plays of Euripides in their chronological order, insofar as it can be known, he becomes aware that the poet's thought is increasingly marked by a pervading sense of disillusionment. One can feel a firmness of grasp in the *Hippolytus* or the *Medea* which is apparently not present in the later plays. Certainly in *The Trojan Women* we do not even have a counterpart to Euripides' underlying optimism and confidence in Athens and her institutions which distinguish both *The Heracleidae* and *The Suppliants*. On the contrary we feel that the poet has become a man whose faith is failing him and yet one who believed that faith in some form must be maintained.

In a very fundamental sense *The Trojan Women* seems to reflect Euripides' reaction to a shattered ideal. The play, produced in the spring of 415 B.C., followed closely upon the siege and capture of the island of Melos by the Athenians. In a spirit of cold-blooded and brutal imperialism, Athens had taken the island, massacred the adult male population, and sold the women and children as slaves. Melos' only crime had been that she wished to remain neutral. The whole episode is treated brilliantly by Thucydides, who is unmitigated in his condemnation of the crime. It is not surprising therefore that Euripides' illusion of a great and just democratic Athens crumbled into nothing. Even at the very moment when the play appeared, the same military faction which had determined upon the action against Melos was still in power and was gathering its forces to embark upon the ill-fated expedition against Sicily.

The Trojan Women perhaps from the point of view of structure is not strictly speaking a play, but rather is a tragic pageant which presents one facet of that far greater tragedy, war itself. Inspired by the Melian incident, Euripides centres his attention upon what happens to the women and the children of the conquered, and how the conquerors, having gained their most desired end, inevitably are led to transgress the will of Heaven. The story of Troy immediately after its fall provides the poet with the medium through which he can express his ideas. He places before us one after another of the captive women in a series of harrowing scenes, the tension of which is lifted periodically by relieving choral odes. Practi-

cally without rival for sheer pathos at its best is the scene in which Talthybius, the Greek herald, takes from Andromache her son Astyanax. On the basis of this and similar passages, it has been argued, though not convincingly, that Euripides in his effort to produce pathos has overstepped the limits set by true tragedy.

The emotional strain of the whole play perhaps would be intolerable, were it not for the fact that there is in these women, though utterly desolated, inspiring courage and the capacity to endure whatever may follow. It is in this way that Euripides has expressed his ultimate belief in man's dignity and worth and strength. For example, we know from his portrayal of Andromache that she will live, and on some terms will live greatly, even though now she regards death as the highest of goods. The delineation of Hecuba likewise reveals man's seemingly limitless ability to bear suffering. But the play as a whole is most impressive as an indictment against war. When the poet juxtaposes the conquered, in the persons of these women, and the conqueror, in the person of Menelaus, who, though he has regained Helen, finds that he has won nothing, we have a situation which proclaims in powerful accents the cruelty, folly, and futility of war. European literature can boast a no more potent document on this theme than *The Trojan Women.*

THE TROJAN WOMEN

(*The scene represents a battlefield, a few days after the battle. At the back are the walls of Troy, partially ruined. In front of them, to right and left, are some huts, containing those of the Captive Women who have been specially set apart for the chief Greek leaders. At one side some dead bodies of armed men are visible. In front a tall woman with white hair is lying on the ground asleep.*
It is the dusk of early dawn, before sunrise. The figure of the god POSEIDON *is dimly seen before the walls.*)

POSEIDON

UP FROM Aegean caverns, pool by pool
Of blue salt sea, where feet most beautiful
Of Nereid maidens weave beneath the foam
Their long sea-dances, I, their lord, am come,
Poseidon of the Sea. 'Twas I whose power,
With great Apollo, builded tower by tower
These walls of Troy; and still my care doth stand
True to the ancient People of my hand;
Which now as smoke is perished, in the shock
Of Argive spears. Down from Parnassus' rock
The Greek Epeios came, of Phocian seed,
And wrought by Pallas' mysteries a Steed
Marvellous, big with arms; and through my wall
It passed, a death-fraught image magical.
The groves are empty and the sanctuaries
Run red with blood. Unburied Priam lies
By his own hearth, on God's high altar-stair,
And Phrygian gold goes forth and raiment rare
To the Argive ships; and weary soldiers roam
Waiting the wind that blows at last for home,
For wives and children, left long years away,
Beyond the seed's tenth fullness and decay,

To work this land's undoing.
And for me,
Since Argive Hera conquereth, and she
Who wrought with Hera to the Phrygians' woe,
Pallas, behold, I bow mine head and go
Forth from great Ilion and mine altars old.
When a still city lieth in the hold
Of Desolation, all God's spirit there
Is sick and turns from worship.—Hearken where
The ancient River waileth with a voice
Of many women, portioned by the choice
Of war amid new lords, as the lots leap
For Thessaly, or Argos, or the steep
Of Theseus' Rock. And others yet there are,
High women, chosen from the waste of war
For the great kings, behind these portals hid;
And with them that Laconian Tyndarid,
Helen, like them a prisoner and a prize.
And this unhappy one—would any eyes
Gaze now on Hecuba? Here at the Gates
She lies 'mid many tears for many fates
Of wrong. One child beside Achilles' grave
In secret slain, Polyxena the brave,
Lies bleeding. Priam and his sons are gone;
And, lo, Cassandra, she the Chosen One,
Whom Lord Apollo spared to walk her way
A swift and virgin spirit, on this day
Lust hath her, and she goeth garlanded
A bride of wrath to Agamemnon's bed.
(*He turns to go; and another divine Presence becomes visible in the dusk. It is the goddess* PALLAS ATHENA.)
O happy long ago, farewell, farewell,
Ye shining towers and mine old citadel;
Broken by Pallas, Child of God, or still
Thy roots had held thee true.

PALLAS
Is it the will
Of God's high Brother, to whose hand is given
Great power of old, and worship of all Heaven,
To suffer speech from one whose enmities
This day are cast aside?

POSEIDON

His will it is:
Kindred and long companionship withal,
Most high Athena, are things magical.

PALLAS

Blest be thy gentle mood!—Methinks I see
A road of comfort here, for thee and me.

POSEIDON

Thou hast some counsel of the Gods, or word
Spoken of Zeus? Or is it tidings heard
From some far Spirit?

PALLAS

For this Ilion's sake,
Whereon we tread, I seek thee, and would make
My hand as thine.

POSEIDON

Hath that old hate and deep
Failed, where she lieth in her ashen sleep?
Thou pitiest her?

PALLAS

Speak first; wilt thou be one
In heart with me and hand till all be done?

POSEIDON

Yea; but lay bare thy heart. For this land's sake
Thou comest, not for Hellas?

PALLAS

I would make
Mine ancient enemies laugh for joy, and bring
On these Greek ships a bitter homecoming.

POSEIDON

Swift is thy spirit's path, and strange withal,
And hot thy love and hate, where'er they fall.

PALLAS

A deadly wrong they did me, yea within
Mine holy place: thou knowest?

POSEIDON

I know the sin
Of Ajax, when he cast Cassandra down [1] . . .

PALLAS

And no man rose and smote him; not a frown
Nor word from all the Greeks!

POSEIDON

And 'twas thine hand
That gave them Troy!

PALLAS

Therefore with thee I stand
To smite them.

POSEIDON

All thou cravest, even now
Is ready in mine heart. What seekest thou?

PALLAS

An homecoming that striveth ever more
And cometh to no home.

POSEIDON

Here on the shore
Wouldst hold them or amid mine own salt foam?

PALLAS

When the last ship hath bared her sail for home!
Zeus shall send rain, long rain and flaw of driven
Hail, and a whirling darkness blown from heaven;
To me his levin-light he promiseth
O'er ships and men, for scourging and hot death:
Do thou make wild the roads of the sea, and steep
With war of waves and yawning of the deep,
Till dead men choke Euboea's curling bay.
So Greece shall dread even in an after day
My house, nor scorn the Watchers of strange lands!

POSEIDON

I give thy boon unbartered. These mine hands
Shall stir the waste Aegean; reefs that cross
The Delian pathways, jag-torn Myconos,
Scyros and Lemnos, yea, and storm-driven
Caphereus with the bones of drownèd men

Shall glut him.—Go thy ways, and bid the Sire
Yield to thine hand the arrows of his fire.
Then wait thine hour, when the last ship shall wind
Her cable coil for home!

(*Exit* PALLAS)

How are ye blind,
Ye treaders down of cities, ye that cast
Temples to desolation, and lay waste
Tombs, the untrodden sanctuaries where lie
The ancient dead; yourselves so soon to die!

(*Exit* POSEIDON)

(*The day slowly dawns:* HECUBA *wakes.*)

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Up from the earth, O weary head!
This is not Troy, about, above—
Not Troy, nor we the lords thereof.
Thou breaking neck, be strengthenèd!

Endure and chafe not. The winds rave
And falter. Down the world's wide road,
Float, float where streams the breath of God;
Nor turn thy prow to breast the wave.

Ah woe! . . . For what woe lacketh here?
My children lost, my land, my lord.
O thou great wealth of glory, stored
Of old in Ilion, year by year

We watched . . . and wert thou nothingness?
What is there that I fear to say?
And yet, what help? . . . Ah, well-a-day,
This ache of lying, comfortless

And haunted! Ah, my side, my brow
And temples! All with changeful pain
My body rocketh, and would fain
Move to the tune of tears that flow:
For tears are music too, and keep
A song unheard in hearts that weep.

(*She rises and gazes towards the Greek ships far off on the shore.*)

O ships, O crowding faces
  Of ships, O hurrying beat
  Of oars as of crawling feet,
How found ye our holy places?
Threading the narrows through,
  Out from the gulfs of the Greek,
Out to the clear dark blue,
  With hate ye came and with joy,
And the noise of your music flew,
  Clarion and pipe did shriek,
As the coilèd cords ye threw,
  Held in the heart of Troy!

What sought ye then that ye came?
  A woman, a thing abhorred:
  A King's wife that her lord
Hateth: and Castor's shame
  Is hot for her sake, and the reeds
Of old Eurotas stir
With the noise of the name of her.
  She slew mine ancient King,
  The Sower of fifty Seeds,
    And cast forth mine and me,
  As shipwrecked men, that cling
    To a reef in an empty sea.

Who am I that I sit
  Here at a Greek king's door,
Yea, in the dust of it?
  A slave that men drive before,
A woman that hath no home,
  Weeping alone for her dead;
  A low and bruisèd head,
And the glory struck therefrom.
(*She starts up from her solitary brooding, and calls to the other Trojan Women in the huts.*)

O Mothers of the Brazen Spear,
  And maidens, maidens, brides of shame,
  Troy is a smoke, a dying flame;
Together we will weep for her:
I call ye as a wide-wing'd bird
  Calleth the children of her fold,

To cry, ah, not the cry men heard
In Ilion, not the songs of old,
That echoed when my hand was true
On Priam's sceptre, and my feet
Touched on the stone one signal beat,
And out the Dardan music rolled;
And Troy's great Gods gave ear thereto.
(*The door of one of the huts on the right opens, and the Women steal out severally, startled and afraid.*)

FIRST WOMAN

strophe 1

How say'st thou? Whither moves thy cry,
Thy bitter cry? Behind our door
We heard thy heavy heart outpour
Its sorrow: and there shivered by
Fear and a quick sob shaken
From prisoned hearts that shall be free no more!

HECUBA

Child, 'tis the ships that stir upon the shore . . .

SECOND WOMAN

The ships, the ships awaken!

THIRD WOMAN

Dear God, what would they? Overseas
Bear me afar to strange cities?

HECUBA

Nay, child, I know not. Dreams are these,
Fears of the hope-forsaken.

FIRST WOMAN

Awake, O daughters of affliction, wake
And learn your lots! Even now the Argives break
Their camp for sailing!

HECUBA

Ah, not Cassandra! Wake not her
Whom God hath maddened, lest the foe
Mock at her dreaming. Leave me clear
From that one edge of woe.
O Troy, my Troy, thou diest here
Most lonely; and most lonely we

The living wander forth from thee,
And the dead leave thee wailing!
(*One of the huts on the left is now open, and the rest of the* CHORUS *come out severally. Their number eventually amounts to fifteen.*)

FOURTH WOMAN

antistrophe 1

Out of the tent of the Greek king
I steal, my Queen, with trembling breath:
What means thy call? Not death; not death!
They would not slay so low a thing!

FIFTH WOMAN

O, 'tis the ship-folk crying
To deck the galleys: and we part, we part!

HECUBA

Nay, daughter: take the morning to thine heart.

FIFTH WOMAN

My heart with dread is dying!

SIXTH WOMAN

An herald from the Greek hath come!

FIFTH WOMAN

How have they cast me, and to whom
A bondmaid?

HECUBA

Peace, child: wait thy doom.
Our lots are near the trying.

FOURTH WOMAN

Argos, belike, or Phthia shall it be,
Or some lone island of the tossing sea,
Far, far from Troy?

HECUBA

And I the agèd, where go I,
A winter-frozen bee, a slave
Death-shapen, as the stones that lie
Hewn on a dead man's grave:
The children of mine enemy
To foster, or keep watch before

The threshold of a master's door,
I that was Queen in Troy!

A WOMAN TO ANOTHER

strophe 2

And thou, what tears can tell thy doom?

THE OTHER

The shuttle still shall flit and change
Beneath my fingers, but the loom,
Sister, be strange.

ANOTHER (*wildly*)

Look, my dead child! My child, my love,
The last look. . . .

ANOTHER

Oh, there cometh worse.
A Greek's bed in the dark. . . .

ANOTHER

God curse
That night and all the powers thereof!

ANOTHER

Or pitchers to and fro to bear
To some Pirene on the hill,
Where the proud water craveth still
Its broken-hearted minister.

ANOTHER

God guide me yet to Theseus' land,
The gentle land, the famed afar . . .

ANOTHER

But not the hungry foam—Ah, never!—
Of fierce Eurotas, Helen's river,
To bow to Menelaus' hand,
That wasted Troy with war!

A WOMAN

antistrophe 2

They told us of a land high-born,
Where glimmers round Olympus' roots
A lordly river, red with corn
And burdened fruits.

ANOTHER

Aye, that were next in my desire
To Athens, where good spirits dwell . . .

ANOTHER

Or Aetna's breast, the deeps of fire
That front the Tyrian's Citadel:
First mother, she, of Sicily
And mighty mountains: fame hath told
Their crowns of goodness manifold. . . .

ANOTHER

And, close beyond the narrowing sea,
A sister land, where float enchanted
Ionian summits, wave on wave,
And Crathis of the burning tresses
Makes red the happy vale, and blesses
With gold of fountains spirit-haunted
Homes of true men and brave!

LEADER

But lo, who cometh: and his lips
Grave with the weight of dooms unknown:
A Herald from the Grecian ships.
Swift comes he, hot-foot to be done
And finished. Ah, what bringeth he
Of news or judgment? Slaves are we,
Spoils that the Greek hath won!
(TALTHYBIUS, *followed by some Soldiers, enters from the left.*)

TALTHYBIUS

Thou know'st me, Hecuba. Often have I crossed
Thy plain with tidings from the Hellene host.
'Tis I, Talthybius. . . . Nay, of ancient use
Thou know'st me. And I come to bear thee news.

HECUBA

Ah me, 'tis here, 'tis here,
Women of Troy, our long embosomed fear!

TALTHYBIUS

The lots are cast, if that it was ye feared.

HECUBA

What lord, what land. . . . Ah me,
Phthia or Thebes, or sea-worn Thessaly?

TALTHYBIUS

Each hath her own. Ye go not in one herd.

HECUBA

Say then what lot hath any? What of joy
Falls, or can fall, on any child of Troy?

TALTHYBIUS

I know: but make thy question severally.

HECUBA

My stricken one must be
Still first. Say how Cassandra's portion lies.

TALTHYBIUS

Chosen from all for Agamemnon's prize!

HECUBA

How, for his Spartan bride
A tirewoman? For Helen's sister's pride?

TALTHYBIUS

Nay, nay: a bride herself, for the King's bed.

HECUBA

The sainted of Apollo? And her own
Prize that God promisèd
Out of the golden clouds, her virgin crown? . . .

TALTHYBIUS

He loved her for that same strange holiness.

HECUBA

Daughter, away, away,
Cast all away,
The haunted Keys,[2] the lonely stole's array
That kept thy body like a sacred place!

TALTHYBIUS

Is't not rare fortune that the King hath smiled
On such a maid?

HECUBA

What of that other child
Ye reft from me but now?

TALTHYBIUS (*speaking with some constraint*)

Polyxena? Or what child meanest thou?

HECUBA

The same. What man now hath her, or what doom?

TALTHYBIUS

She rests apart, to watch Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA

To watch a tomb? My daughter? What is this? . . .
Speak, Friend? What fashion of the laws of Greece?

TALTHYBIUS

Count thy maid happy! She hath naught of ill
To fear . . .

HECUBA

What meanest thou? She liveth still?

TALTHYBIUS

I mean, she hath one toil that holds her free
From all toil else.

HECUBA

What of Andromache,
Wife of mine iron-hearted Hector, where
Journeyeth she?

TALTHYBIUS

Pyrrhus, Achilles' son, hath taken her.

HECUBA

And I, whose slave am I,
The shaken head, the arm that creepeth by,
Staff-crutchèd, like to fall?

TALTHYBIUS

Odysseus, Ithaca's king, hath thee for thrall.

HECUBA

Beat, beat the crownless head:
Rend the cheek till the tears run red!

A lying man and a pitiless
Shall be lord of me, a heart full-flown
With scorn of righteousness:
O heart of a beast where law is none,
Where all things change so that lust be fed,
The oath and the deed, the right and the wrong,
Even the hate of the forkèd tongue:
Even the hate turns and is cold,
False as the love that was false of old!

O Women of Troy, weep for me!
Yea, I am gone: I am gone my ways.
Mine is the crown of misery,
The bitterest day of all our days.

LEADER

Thy fate thou knowest, Queen: but I know not
What lord of South or North has won my lot.

TALTHYBIUS

Go, seek Cassandra, men! Make your best speed,
That I may leave her with the King, and lead
These others to their divers lords. . . . Ha, there!
What means that sudden light? Is it the flare
Of torches?
(*Light is seen shining through the crevices of the second hut on the right. He moves towards it.*)
Would they fire their prison rooms,
Or how, these women?—Yes, 'fore God, the dooms
Are known, and now they burn themselves and die
Rather than sail with us! How savagely
In days like these a free neck chafes beneath
Its burden! . . . Open! Open quick! Such death
Were bliss to them, it may be: but 'twill bring
Much wrath, and leave me shamed before the King!

HECUBA

There is no fire, no peril: 'tis my child,
Cassandra, by the breath of God made wild.
(*The door opens from within and* CASSANDRA *enters, white-robed and wreathed like a Priestess, a great torch in her hand. She is singing softly to herself and does not see the Herald or the scene before her.*)

CASSANDRA

strophe

Lift, lift it high:
Give it to mine hand!
Lo, I bear a flame
Unto God! I praise his name.
I light with a burning brand
This sanctuary.
Blessèd is he that shall wed,
And blessèd, blessèd am I
In Argos: a bride to lie
With a king in a king's bed.

Hail, O Hymen red,
O Torch that makest one!
Weepest thou, Mother mine own?
Surely thy cheek is pale
With tears, tears that wail
For a land and a father dead.
But I go garlanded:
I am the Bride of Desire:
Therefore my torch is borne—
Lo, the lifting of morn,
Lo, the leaping of fire!—

For thee, O Hymen bright,
For thee, O Moon of the Deep,
So Law hath charged, for the light
Of a maid's last sleep.

antistrophe

Awake, O my feet, awake:
Our father's hope is won!
Dance as the dancing skies
Over him, where he lies
Happy beneath the sun! . . .
Lo, the Ring that I make . . .
(*She makes a circle round her with a torch, and visions appear to her.*)
Apollo! . . . Ah, is it thou?
O shrine in the laurels cold,
I bear thee still, as of old,
Mine incense! Be near to me now.
(*She waves the torch as though bearing incense.*)

O Hymen, Hymen fleet:
  Quick torch that makest one! . . .
  How? Am I still alone?
Laugh as I laugh, and twine
In the dance, O Mother mine:
  Dear feet, be near my feet!

Come, greet ye Hymen, greet
  Hymen with songs of pride:
Sing to him loud and long,
Cry, cry, when the song
  Faileth, for joy of the bride!

O Damsels girt in the gold
  Of Ilion, cry, cry ye,
For him that is doomed of old
  To be lord of me!

LEADER

O hold the damsel, lest her trancèd feet
Lift her afar, Queen, toward the Hellene fleet!

HECUBA

O Fire, Fire, where men make marriages
Surely thou hast thy lot; but what are these
Thou bringest flashing? Torches savage-wild
And far from mine old dreams.—Alas, my child,
How little dreamed I then of wars or red
Spears of the Greek to lay thy bridal bed!
Give me thy brand; it hath no holy blaze
Thus in thy frenzy flung. Nor all thy days
Nor all thy griefs have changed them yet, nor learned
Wisdom.—Ye women, bear the pine half burned
To the chamber back; and let your drownèd eyes
Answer the music of these bridal cries!
(*She takes the torch and gives it to one of the women.*)

CASSANDRA

O Mother, fill mine hair with happy flowers,
And speed me forth. Yea, if my spirit cowers,
Drive me with wrath! So liveth Loxias,
A bloodier bride than ever Helen was
Go I to Agamemnon, Lord most high
Of Hellas! [3] . . . I shall kill him, mother; I

Shall kill him, and lay waste his house with fire
As he laid ours. My brethren and my sire
Shall win again . . .
(*Checking herself*) But part I must let be,
And speak not. Not the axe that craveth me,
And more than me; not the dark wanderings
Of mother-murder that my bridal brings,
And all the House of Atreus down, down, down . . .

Nay, I will show thee. Even now this town
Is happier than the Greeks. I know the power
Of God is on me: but this little hour,
Wilt thou but listen, I will hold him back!
One love, one woman's beauty, o'er the track
Of hunted Helen, made their myriads fall.
And this their King so wise, who ruleth all,
What wrought he? Cast out Love that Hate might feed:
Gave to his brother his own child, his seed
Of gladness, that a woman fled, and fain
To fly for ever, should be turned again!
So the days waned, and armies on the shore
Of Simois stood and strove and died. Wherefore?
No man had moved their landmarks; none had shook
Their wallèd towns.—And they whom Ares took,
Had never seen their children: no wife came
With gentle arms to shroud the limbs of them
For burial, in a strange and angry earth
Laid dead. And there at home, the same long dearth:
Women that lonely died, and aged men
Waiting for sons that ne'er should turn again,
Nor know their graves, nor pour drink-offerings,
To still the unslakèd dust. These be the things
The conquering Greek hath won!
But we—what pride,
What praise of men were sweeter?—fighting died
To save our people. And when war was red
Around us, friends upbore the gentle dead
Home, and dear women's hands about them wound
White shrouds, and here they sleep in the old ground
Belovèd. And the rest long days fought on,
Dwelling with wives and children, not alone
And joyless, like these Greeks.
And Hector's woe,

What is it? He is gone, and all men know
His glory, and how true a heart he bore.
It is the gift the Greek hath brought! Of yore
Men saw him not, nor knew him. Yea, and even
Paris hath loved withal a child of heaven:
Else had his love but been as others are.
Would ye be wise, ye Cities, fly from war!
Yet if war come, there is a crown in death
For her that striveth well and perisheth
Unstained: to die in evil were the stain!
Therefore, O Mother, pity not thy slain,
Nor Troy, nor me, the bride. Thy direst foe
And mine by this my wooing is brought low.

TALTHYBIUS

(*at last breaking through the spell that has held him*)
I swear, had not Apollo made thee mad,
Not lightly hadst thou flung this shower of bad
Bodings, to speed my General o'er the seas!
'Fore God, the wisdoms and the greatnesses
Of seeming, are they hollow all, as things
Of naught? This son of Atreus, of all kings
Most mighty, hath so bowed him to the love
Of this mad maid, and chooseth her above
All women! By the Gods, rude though I be,
I would not touch her hand!
Look thou; I see
Thy lips are blind, and whatso words they speak,
Praises of Troy or shamings of the Greek,
I cast to the four winds! Walk at my side
In peace! . . . And heaven content him of his bride!
(*He moves as though to go, but turns to* HECUBA, *and speaks more gently.*)
And thou shalt follow to Odysseus' host
When the word comes. 'Tis a wise queen thou go'st
To serve, and gentle: so the Ithacans say.

CASSANDRA

(*seeing for the first time the Herald and all the scene*)
How fierce a slave! . . . O Heralds, Heralds! Yea,
Voices of Death; and mists are over them
Of dead men's anguish, like a diadem,
These weak abhorrèd things that serve the hate

Of kings and peoples! . . .
To Odysseus' gate
My mother goeth, say'st thou? Is God's word
As naught, to me in silence ministered,
That in this place she dies? . . . (*To herself*) No more; no more!
Why should I speak the shame of them, before
They come? . . . Little he knows, that hard-beset
Spirit, what deeps of woe await him yet;
Till all these tears of ours and harrowings
Of Troy, by his, shall be as golden things.
Ten years behind ten years athwart his way
Waiting: and home, lost and unfriended . . .
Nay:
Why should Odysseus' labours vex my breath?
On; hasten; guide me to the house of Death,
To lie beside my bridegroom! . . .
Thou Greek King,
Who deem'st thy fortune now so high a thing,
Thou dust of the earth, a lowlier bed I see,
In darkness, not in light, awaiting thee:
And with thee, with thee . . . there, where yawneth plain
A rift of the hills, raging with winter rain,
Dead . . . and outcast . . . and naked . . . It is I
Beside my bridegroom: and the wild beasts cry,
And ravin on God's chosen!
(*She clasps her hands to her brow and feels the wreaths.*)
O, ye wreaths!
Ye garlands of my God, whose love yet breathes
About me; shapes of joyance mystical;
Begone! I have forgot the festival,
Forgot the joy. Begone! I tear ye, so,
From off me! . . . Out on the swift winds they go.
With flesh still clean I give them back to thee,
Still white, O God, O light that leadest me!
(*Turning upon the Herald*)
Where lies the galley? Whither shall I tread?
See that your watch be set, your sail be spread.
The wind comes quick! . . . Three Powers[4]—mark me, thou!—
There be of Hell, and one walks with thee now!
Mother, farewell, and weep not! O my sweet
City, my earth-clad brethren, and thou great

Sire that begat us; but a little now,
And I am with you: yea, with shining brow
I come, ye Dead, and shining from the fall
Of Atreus' House, the House that wrecked us all!
(*She goes out, followed by* TALTHYBIUS *and the Soldiers;* HECUBA, *after waiting for an instant motionless, falls to the ground.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The Queen, ye Watchers! See, she falls, she falls,
Rigid without a word! O sorry thralls,
Too late! And will ye leave her downstricken,
A woman, and so old? Raise her again!
(*Some women go to* HECUBA, *but she refuses their aid and speaks without rising.*)

HECUBA

Let lie . . . the love we seek not is no love . . .
This ruined body! Is the fall thereof
Too deep for all that now is over me
Of anguish, and hath been, and yet shall be?
Ye Gods . . . Alas! Why call on things so weak
For aid? Yet there is something that doth seek,
Crying, for God, when one of us hath woe.
O, I will think of things gone long ago
And weave them to a song, like one more tear
In the heart of misery. . . . All kings we were;
And I must wed a king. And sons I brought
My lord King, many sons . . . nay, that were naught;
But high strong princes, of all Troy the best.
Hellas nor Troäs nor the garnered East
Held such a mother! And all these things beneath
The Argive spear I saw cast down in death,
And shore these tresses at the dead men's feet.
Yea, and the gardener of my garden great,
It was not any noise of him nor tale
I wept for; these eyes saw him, when the pale
Was broke, and there at the altar Priam fell
Murdered, and round him all his citadel
Sacked. And my daughters, virgins of the fold,
Meet to be brides of mighty kings, behold,
'Twas for the Greek I bred them! All are gone;
And no hope left, that I shall look upon
Their faces any more, nor they on mine.

And now my feet tread on the utmost line:
An old, old slave-woman, I pass below
Mine enemies' gates; and whatso task they know
For this age basest, shall be mine; the door,
Bowing, to shut and open. . . . I that bore
Hector! . . . and meal to grind, and this racked head
Bend to the stones after a royal bed;
Torn rags about me, aye, and under them
Torn flesh; 'twill make a woman sick for shame!
Woe's me; and all that one man's arms might hold
One woman, what long seas have o'er me rolled
And roll for ever! . . . O my child, whose white
Soul laughed amid the laughter of God's light,
Cassandra, what hands and how strange a day
Have loosed thy zone! And thou, Polyxena,
Where art thou? And my sons? Not any seed
Of man nor woman now shall help my need.
Why raise me any more? What hope have I
To hold me? Take this slave that once trod high
In Ilion; cast her on her bed of clay
Rock-pillowed, to lie down, and pass away
Wasted with tears. And whatso man they call
Happy, believe not ere the last day fall! [5]

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

O Muse, be near me now, and make
A strange song for Ilion's sake,
Till a tone of tears be about mine ears
And out of my lips a music break
For Troy, Troy, and the end of the years:
When the wheels of the Greek above me pressed,
And the mighty horse-hoofs beat my breast;
And all around were the Argive spears
A towering Steed of golden rein—
O gold without, dark steel within!—
Ramped in our gates; and all the plain
Lay silent where the Greeks had been.
And a cry broke from all the folk
Gathered above on Ilion's rock:
"Up, up, O fear is over now!
To Pallas, who hath saved us living,
To Pallas bear this victory-vow!"

Then rose the old man from his room,
The merry damsel left her loom,
And each bound death about his brow
With minstrelsy and high thanksgiving!

antistrophe

O, swift were all in Troy that day,
And girt them to the portal-way,
Marvelling at that mountain Thing
Smooth-carven, where the Argives lay,
And wrath, and Ilion's vanquishing:
Meet gift for her that spareth not,
Heaven's yokeless Rider.[6] Up they brought
Through the steep gates her offering:
Like some dark ship that climbs the shore
On straining cables, up, where stood
Her marble throne, her hallowed floor,
Who lusted for her people's blood.

A very weariness of joy
Fell with the evening over Troy:
And lutes of Afric mingled there
With Phrygian songs: and many a maiden,
With white feet glancing light as air,
Made happy music through the gloom:
And fires on many an inward room
All night broad-flashing, flung their glare
On laughing eyes and slumber-laden.

A Maiden

I was among the dancers there
To Artemis, and glorying sang
Her of the Hills, the Maid most fair,
Daughter of Zeus: and, lo, there rang
A shout out of the dark, and fell
Deathlike from street to street, and made
A silence in the citadel:
And a child cried, as if afraid,
And hid him in his mother's veil.
Then stalked the Slayer from his den,
The hand of Pallas served her well!
O blood, blood of Troy was deep
About the streets and altars then:
And in the wedded rooms of sleep,

Lo, the desolate dark alone,
And headless things, men stumbled on.

And forth, lo, the women go,
The crown of War, the crown of Woe,
To bear the children of the foe
And weep, weep, for Ilion!

(*As the song ceases a chariot is seen approaching from the town, laden with spoils. On it sits a mourning Woman with a child in her arms.*)

LEADER

Lo, yonder on the heapèd crest
Of a Greek wain, Andromache,
As one that o'er an unknown sea
Tosseth; and on her wave-borne breast
Her loved one clingeth, Hector's child,
Astyanax . . . O most forlorn
Of women, whither go'st thou, borne
'Mid Hector's bronzen arms, and piled
Spoils of the dead, and pageantry
Of them that hunted Ilion down?
Aye, richly thy new lord shall crown
The mountain shrines of Thessaly!

ANDROMACHE

strophe 1

Forth to the Greek I go,
Driven as a beast is driven.[7]

HECUBA

Woe, woe!

ANDROMACHE

Nay, mine is woe:
Woe to none other given,
And the song and the crown therefor!

HECUBA

O Zeus!

ANDROMACHE

He hates thee sore!

HECUBA

Children!

ANDROMACHE

No more, no more
To aid thee: their strife is striven!

HECUBA

antistrophe 1

Troy, Troy is gone!

ANDROMACHE

Yea, and her treasure parted.

HECUBA

Gone, gone, mine own
Children, the noble-hearted!

ANDROMACHE

Sing sorrow. . . .

HECUBA

For me, for me!

ANDROMACHE

Sing for the Great City,
That falleth, falleth to be
A shadow, a fire departed.

ANDROMACHE

strophe 2

Come to me, O my lover!

HECUBA

The dark shroudeth him over,
My flesh, woman, not thine, not thine!

ANDROMACHE

Make of thine arms my cover!

HECUBA

antistrophe 2

O thou whose wound was deepest,
Thou that my children keepest,
Priam, Priam, O age-worn King,
Gather me where thou sleepest.

ANDROMACHE (*her hands upon her heart*)
strophe 3

O here is the deep of desire,

HECUBA
(How? And is this not woe?)

ANDROMACHE
For a city burned with fire;

HECUBA
(It beateth, blow on blow.)

ANDROMACHE
God's wrath for Paris, thy son, that he died not long ago:
Who sold for his evil love
Troy and the towers thereof:
Therefore the dead men lie
Naked, beneath the eye
Of Pallas, and vultures croak
And flap for joy:
So Love hath laid his yoke
On the neck of Troy!

HECUBA
antistrophe 3

O mine own land, my home,

ANDROMACHE
(I weep for thee, left forlorn,)

HECUBA
See'st thou what end is come?

ANDROMACHE
(And the house where my babes were born.)

HECUBA
A desolate Mother we leave, O children, a City of scorn:

Even as the sound of a song [8]
Left by the way, but long
Remembered, a tune of tears
Falling where no man hears,
In the old house, as rain,
For things loved of yore:

But the dead hath lost his pain
And weeps no more.

LEADER

How sweet are tears to them in bitter stress,
And sorrow, and all the songs of heaviness.

ANDROMACHE

Mother of him of old, whose mighty spear
Smote Greeks like chaff, see'st thou what things are here?

HECUBA

I see God's hand, that buildeth a great crown
For littleness, and hath cast the mighty down.

ANDROMACHE

I and my babe are driven among the droves
Of plundered cattle. O, when fortune moves
So swift, the high heart like a slave beats low.

HECUBA

'Tis fearful to be helpless. Men but now
Have taken Cassandra, and I strove in vain.

ANDROMACHE

Ah, woe is me; hath Ajax come again?
But other evil yet is at thy gate.

HECUBA

Nay, Daughter, beyond number, beyond weight
My evils are! Doom raceth against doom.

ANDROMACHE

Polyxena across Achilles' tomb
Lies slain, a gift flung to the dreamless dead.

HECUBA

My sorrow! . . . 'Tis but what Talthybius said:
So plain a riddle, and I read it not.

ANDROMACHE

I saw her lie, and stayed this chariot;
And raiment wrapt on her dead limbs, and beat
My breast for her.

HECUBA (*to herself*)
O the foul sin of it!
The wickedness! My child. My child! Again
I cry to thee. How cruelly art thou slain!

ANDROMACHE
She hath died her death, and howso dark it be,
Her death is sweeter than my misery.

HECUBA
Death cannot be what Life is, Child; the cup
Of Death is empty, and Life hath always hope.

ANDROMACHE
O Mother, having ears, hear thou this word
Fear-conquering, till thy heart as mine be stirred
With joy. To die is only not to be;
And better to be dead than grievously
Living. They have no pain, they ponder not
Their own wrong. But the living that is brought
From joy to heaviness, his soul doth roam,
As in a desert, lost, from its old home.
Thy daughter lieth now as one unborn,
Dead, and naught knowing of the lust and scorn
That slew her. And I . . . long since I drew my bow
Straight at the heart of good fame; and I know
My shaft hit; and for that am I the more
Fallen from peace. All that men praise us for,
I loved for Hector's sake, and sought to win.
I knew that alway, be there hurt therein
Or utter innocence, to roam abroad
Hath ill report for women; so I trod
Down the desire thereof, and walked my way
In mine own garden. And light words and gay
Parley of women never passed my door.
The thoughts of mine own heart . . . I craved no more . . .
Spoke with me, and I was happy. Constantly
I brought fair silence and a tranquil eye
For Hector's greeting, and watched well the way
Of living, where to guide and where obey.
And, lo! some rumour of this peace, being gone
Forth to the Greek, hath cursed me. Achilles' son,
So soon as I was taken, for his thrall
Chose me. I shall do service in the hall

Of them that slew . . . How? Shall I thrust aside
Hector's belovèd face, and open wide
My heart to this new lord? Oh, I should stand
A traitor to the dead! And if my hand
And flesh shrink from him . . . lo, wrath and despite
O'er all the house, and I a slave!
One night,
One night . . . aye, men have said it . . . maketh tame
A woman in a man's arms. . . . O shame, shame!
What woman's lips can so forswear her dead,
And give strange kisses in another's bed?
Why, not a dumb beast, not a colt will run
In the yoke untroubled, when her mate is gone—
A thing not in God's image, dull, unmoved
Of reason. O my Hector! best beloved,
That, being mine, wast all in all to me,
My prince, my wise one, O my majesty
Of valiance! No man's touch had ever come
Near me, when thou from out my father's home
Didst lead me and make me thine. . . . And thou art dead,
And I war-flung to slavery and the bread
Of shame in Hellas, over bitter seas!
What knoweth she of evils like to these,
That dead Polyxena, thou weepest for?
There liveth not in my life any more
The hope that others have. Nor will I tell
The lie to mine own heart, that aught is well
Or shall be well. . . . Yet, O, to dream were sweet!

LEADER

Thy feet have trod the pathway of my feet,
And thy clear sorrow teacheth me mine own.

HECUBA

Lo, yonder ships: I ne'er set foot on one,
But tales and pictures tell, when over them
Breaketh a storm not all too strong to stem,
Each man strives hard, the tiller gripped, the mast
Manned, the hull baled, to face it: till at last
Too strong breaks the o'erwhelming sea: lo, then
They cease, and yield them up as broken men
To fate and the wild waters. Even so
I in my many sorrows bear me low,
Nor curse, nor strive that other things may be.

The great wave rolled from God hath conquered me.
But, O, let Hector and the fates that fell
On Hector, sleep. Weep for him ne'er so well,
Thy weeping shall not wake him. Honour thou
The new lord that is set above thee now,
And make of thine own gentle piety
A prize to lure his heart. So shalt thou be
A strength to them that love us, and—God knows,
It may be—rear this babe among his foes,
My Hector's child, to manhood and great aid
For Ilion. So her stones may yet be laid
One on another, if God will, and wrought
Again to a city! Ah, how thought to thought
Still beckons! . . . But what minion of the Greek
Is this that cometh, with new words to speak?
(*Enter* TALTHYBIUS *with a band of Soldiers. He comes forward slowly and with evident disquiet.*)

TALTHYBIUS

Spouse of the noblest heart that beat in Troy,
Andromache, hate me not! 'Tis not in joy
I tell thee. But the people and the Kings
Have with one voice . . .

ANDROMACHE

What is it? Evil things
Are on thy lips!

TALTHYBIUS

'Tis ordered, this child . . . Oh,
How can I tell her of it?

ANDROMACHE

Doth he not go
With me, to the same master?

TALTHYBIUS

There is none
In Greece, shall e'er be master of thy son.

ANDROMACHE

How? Will they leave him here to build again
The wreck? . . .

TALTHYBIUS
I know not how to tell thee plain!

ANDROMACHE
Thou hast a gentle heart . . . if it be ill,
And not good, news thou hidest!

TALTHYBIUS
'Tis their will
Thy son shall die. . . . The whole vile thing is said
Now!

ANDROMACHE
Oh, I could have bourne mine enemy's bed!

TALTHYBIUS
And speaking in the council of the host
Odysseus hath prevailed—

ANDROMACHE
O lost! lost! lost! . . .
Forgive me! It is not easy . . .

TALTHYBIUS
. . . That the son
Of one so perilous be not fostered on
To manhood—

ANDROMACHE
God; may his own counsel fall
On his own sons!

TALTHYBIUS
. . . But from this crested wall
Of Troy be dashed, and die. . . . Nay, let the thing
Be done. Thou shalt be wiser so. Nor cling
So fiercely to him. Suffer as a brave
Woman in bitter pain; nor think to have
Strength which thou hast not. Look about thee here!
Canst thou see help, or refuge anywhere?
Thy land is fallen and thy lord, and thou
A prisoner and alone, one woman; how
Canst battle against us? For thine own good
I would not have thee strive, nor make ill blood
And shame about thee. . . . Ah, nor move thy lips
In silence there, to cast upon the ships

Thy curse! One word of evil to the host,
This babe shall have no burial, but be tossed
Naked. . . . Ah, peace! And bear as best thou may,
War's fortune. So thou shalt not go thy way
Leaving this child unburied; nor the Greek
Be stern against thee, if thy heart be meek!

ANDROMACHE (*to the child*)

Go, die, my best-beloved, my cherished one,
In fierce men's hands, leaving me here alone.
Thy father was too valiant; that is why
They slay thee! Other children, like to die,
Might have been spared for that. But on thy head
His good is turned to evil.
O thou bed
And bridal; O the joining of the hand,
That led me long ago to Hector's land
To bear, O not a lamb for Grecian swords
To slaughter, but a Prince o'er all the hordes
Enthroned of wide-flung Asia. . . . Weepest thou?
Nay, why, my little one? Thou canst not know.
And Father will not come; he will not come;
Not once, the great spear flashing, and the tomb
Riven to set thee free! Not one of all
His brethren, nor the might of Ilion's wall.
How shall it be? One horrible spring . . . deep, deep
Down. And thy neck . . . Ah God, so cometh sleep! . . .
And none to pity thee! . . . Thou little thing
That curlest in my arms, what sweet scents cling
All round thy neck! Belovèd; can it be
All nothing, that this bosom cradled thee
And fostered; all the weary nights, wherethrough
I watched upon thy sickness, till I grew
Wasted with watching? Kiss me. This one time;
Not ever again. Put up thine arms, and climb
About my neck: now, kiss me, lips to lips. . . .
O, ye have found an anguish that outstrips
All tortures of the East, ye gentle Greeks!
Why will ye slay this innocent, that seeks
No wrong? . . . O Helen, Helen, thou ill tree
That Tyndareus planted, who shall deem of thee
As child of Zeus? O, thou hast drawn thy breath
From many fathers, Madness, Hate, red Death,

And every rotting poison of the sky!
Zeus knows thee not, thou vampire, draining dry.
Greece and the world! God hate thee and destroy,
That with those beautiful eyes hast blasted Troy,
And made the far-famed plains a waste withal.
Quick! take him: drag him: cast him from the wall,
If cast ye will! Tear him, ye beasts, be swift!
God hath undone me, and I cannot lift
One hand, one hand, to save my child from death . . .
O, hide my head for shame: fling me beneath
Your galleys' benches! . . .
(*She swoons: then half-rising*)
Quick: I must begone
To the bridal. . . . I have lost my child, my own!
(*The Soldiers close round her.*)

LEADER

O Troy ill-starred; for one strange woman, one
Abhorrèd kiss, how are thine hosts undone!

TALTHYBIUS

(*bending over* ANDROMACHE *and gradually taking the Child from her*)
Come, Child: let be that clasp of love
Outwearied! Walk thy ways with me,
Up to the crested tower, above
Thy father's wall . . . Where they decree
Thy soul shall perish.—Hold him: hold!—
Would God some other man might ply
These charges, one of duller mould,
And nearer to the iron than I!

HECUBA

O Child, they rob us of our own,
Child of my Mighty One outworn:
Ours, ours thou art!—Can ought be done
Of deeds, can aught of pain be borne,
To aid thee?—Lo, this beaten head,
This bleeding bosom! These I spread
As gifts to thee. I can thus much.
Woe, woe for Troy, and woe for thee!
What fall yet lacketh, ere we touch
The last dead deep of misery?
(*The Child, who has started back from* TALTHYBIUS,
is taken up by one of the Soldiers and borne back

towards the city, while ANDROMACHE *is set again on the Chariot and driven off towards the ships.* TALTHYBIUS *goes with the Child.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)[9]

strophe 1

In Salamis, filled with the foaming
Of billows and murmur of bees,
Old Telamon stayed from his roaming,
Long ago, on a throne of the seas;
Looking out on the hills olive-laden,
Enchanted, where first from the earth
The grey-gleaming fruit of the Maiden
Athena had birth;
A soft grey crown for a city
Belovèd, a City of Light:
Yet he rested not there, nor had pity,
But went forth in his might,
Where Heracles wandered, the lonely
Bow-bearer, and lent him his hands
For the wrecking of one land only,
Of Ilion, Ilion only,
Most hated of lands!

antistrophe 1

Of the bravest of Hellas he made him
A ship-folk, in wrath for the Steeds,
And sailed the wide waters, and stayed him
At last amid Simois' reeds;
And the oars beat slow in the river,
And the long ropes held in the strand,
And he felt for his bow and his quiver,
The wrath of his hand.
And the old king died; and the towers
That Phoebus had builded did fall,
And his wrath, as a flame that devours,
Ran red over all;
And the fields and the woodlands lay blasted,
Long ago. Yea, twice hath the Sire
Uplifted his hand and downcast it
On the wall of the Dardan, downcast it
As a sword and as fire.

strophe 2

In vain, all in vain,
O thou 'mid the wine-jars golden
That movest in delicate joy,
Ganymedes, child of Troy,
The lips of the Highest drain
The cup in thine hand upholden:
And thy mother, thy mother that bore thee,
Is wasted with fire and torn;
And the voice of her shores is heard,
Wild, as the voice of a bird,
For lovers and children before thee
Crying, and mothers outworn.
And the pools of thy bathing are perished,
And the wind-strewn ways of thy feet:
Yet thy face as aforetime is cherished
Of Zeus, and the breath of it sweet;
Yea, the beauty of Calm is upon it
In houses at rest and afar.
But thy land, He hath wrecked and o'erthrown it
In the wailing of war.

antistrophe 2

O Love, ancient Love,
Of old to the Dardan given;
Love of the Lords of the Sky;
How didst thou lift us high
In Ilion, yea, and above
All cities, as wed with heaven!
For Zeus—O leave it unspoken:
But alas for the love of the Morn;
Morn of the milk-white wing,
The gentle, the earth-loving,
That shineth on battlements broken
In Troy, and a people forlorn!
And, lo, in her bowers Tithonus,
Our brother, yet sleeps as of old:
O, she too hath loved us and known us,
And the Steeds of her star, flashing gold,
Stooped hither and bore him above us;
Then blessed we the Gods in our joy.
But all that made them to love us
Hath perished from Troy.

(*As the song ceases, the King* MENELAUS *enters, richly armed and followed by a bodyguard of Soldiers. He is a prey to violent and conflicting emotions.*)

MENELAUS

How bright the face of heaven, and how sweet
The air this day, that layeth at my feet
The woman that I . . . Nay: 'twas not for her
I came. 'Twas for the man, the cozener
And thief, that ate with me and stole away
My bride. But Paris lieth, this long day,
By God's grace, under the horse-hoofs of the Greek,
And round him all his land. And now I seek . . .
Curse her! I scarce can speak the name she bears,
That was my wife. Here with the prisoners
They keep her, in these huts, among the hordes
Of numbered slaves.—The host whose labouring swords
Won her, have given her up to me, to fill
My pleasure; perchance kill her, or not kill,
But lead her home.—Methinks I have foregone
The slaying of Helen here in Ilion . . .
Over the long seas I will bear her back,
And there, there, cast her out to whatso wrack
Of angry death they may devise, who know
Their dearest dead for her in Ilion.—Ho!
Ye soldiers! Up into the chambers where
She croucheth! Grip the long blood-reeking hair,
And drag her to mine eyes . . . (*controlling himself*)
And when there come
Fair breezes, my long ships shall bear her home.
(*The Soldiers go to force open the door of the second hut on the left.*)

HECUBA

Thou deep Base of the World, and thou high Throne
Above the World, whoe'er thou art, unknown
And hard of surmise, Chain of Things that be,
Or Reason of our Reason; God, to thee
I lift my praise, seeing the silent road
That bringeth justice ere the end be trod
To all that breathes and dies.

MENELAUS (*turning*)
Ha! who is there
That prayeth heaven, and in so strange a prayer?

HECUBA
I bless thee, Menelaus, I bless thee,
If thou wilt slay her! Only fear to see
Her visage, lest she snare thee and thou fall!
She snareth strong men's eyes; she snareth tall
Cities; and fire from out her eateth up
Houses. Such magic hath she, as a cup
Of death! . . . Do I not know her? Yea, and thou,
And these that lie around, do they not know?
(*The Soldiers return from the hut and stand aside to let* HELEN *pass between them. She comes through them, gentle and unafraid; there is no disorder in her raiment.*)

HELEN
King Menelaus, thy first deed might make
A woman fear. Into my chamber brake
Thine armèd men, and lead me wrathfully.
Methinks, almost, I know thou hatest me.
Yet I would ask thee, what decree is gone
Forth for my life or death?

MENELAUS (*struggling with his emotion*)
There was not one
That scrupled for thee. All, all with one will
Gave thee to me, whom thou hast wronged, to kill!

HELEN
And is it granted that I speak, or no,
In answer to them ere I die, to show
I die most wronged and innocent?

MENELAUS
I seek
To kill thee, woman; not to hear thee speak!

HECUBA
O hear her! She must never die unheard,
King Menelaus! And give me the word
To speak in answer! All the wrong she wrought
Away from thee, in Troy, thou knowest not.

The whole tale set together is a death
Too sure; she shall not 'scape thee!

MENELAUS

'Tis but breath
And time. For thy sake, Hecuba, if she need
To speak, I grant the prayer. I have no heed
Nor mercy—let her know it well—for her!

HELEN

It may be that, how false or true soe'er
Thou deem me, I shall win no word from thee.
So sore thou holdest me thine enemy.
Yet I will take what words I think thy heart
Holdeth of anger: and in even part
Set my wrong and thy wrong, and all that fell.
(*pointing to* HECUBA)
She cometh first, who bare the seed and well
Of springing sorrow, when to life she brought
Paris: and that old King, who quenchèd not
Quick in the spark, ere yet he woke to slay,
The firebrand's image.[10]—But enough: a day
Came, and this Paris judged beneath the trees
Three Crowns of Life, three diverse Goddesses.
The gift of Pallas was of War, to lead
His East in conquering battles, and make bleed
The hearths of Hellas. Hera held a Throne—
If majesties he craved—to reign alone
From Phrygia to the last realm of the West.
And Cypris, if he deemed her loveliest,
Beyond all heaven, made dreams about my face
And for her grace gave me. And, lo! her grace
Was judged the fairest, and she stood above
Those twain.—Thus was I loved, and thus my love
Hath holpen Hellas. No fierce Eastern crown
Is o'er your lands, no spear hath cast them down.
O, it was well for Hellas! But for me
Most ill; caught up and sold across the sea
For this my beauty; yea, dishonourèd
For that which else had been about my head
A crown of honour. . . . Ah, I see thy thought;
The first plain deed, 'tis that I answer not,
How in the dark out of thy house I fled . . .
There came the Seed of Fire, this woman's seed;

Came—O, a Goddess great walked with him then—
This Alexander, Breaker-down-of-Men,
This Paris, Strength-is-with-him; whom thou, whom—
O false and light of heart—thou in thy room
Didst leave, and spreadest sail for Cretan seas,
Far, far from me! . . . And yet, how strange it is!
I ask not thee; I ask my own sad thought,
What was there in my heart, that I forgot
My home and land and all I loved, to fly
With a strange man? Surely it was not I,
But Cypris, there! Lay thou thy rod on her,
And be more high than Zeus and bitterer,
Who o'er all other spirits hath his throne,
But knows her chain must bind him. My wrong done
Hath its own pardon. . . .
One word yet thou hast,
Methink, of righteous seeming. When at last
The earth for Paris oped and all was o'er,
And her strange magic bound my feet no more,
Why kept I still his house, why fled not I
To the Argive ships? . . . Ah, how I strove to fly!
The old Gate-Warden could have told thee all,
My husband, and the watchers from the wall;
It was not once they took me, with the rope
Tied, and this body swung in the air, to grope
Its way toward thee, from that dim battlement.
Ah, husband still, how shall thy hand be bent
To slay me? Nay, if Right be come at last,
What shalt thou bring but comfort for pains past,
And harbour for a woman storm-driven:
A woman borne away by violent men:
And this one birthright of my beauty, this
That might have been my glory, lo, it is
A stamp that God hath burned, of slavery!
Alas! and if thou cravest still to be
As one set above gods, inviolate,
'Tis but a fruitless longing holds thee yet.

LEADER

O Queen, think of thy children and thy land,
And break her spell! The sweet soft speech, the hand
And heart so fell: it maketh me afraid.

HECUBA

Meseems her goddesses first cry mine aid
Against these lying lips! . . . Not Hera, nay,
Nor virgin Pallas deem I such low clay,
To barter their own folk, Argos and brave
Athens, to be trod down, the Phrygian's slave,
All for vain glory and a shepherd's prize
On Ida! Wherefore should great Hera's eyes
So hunger to be fair? She doth not use
To seek for other loves, being wed with Zeus.
And maiden Pallas . . . did some strange god's face
Beguile her, that she craved for loveliness,
Who chose from God one virgin gift above
All gifts, and fleëth from the lips of love?
  Ah, deck not out thine own heart's evil springs
By making spirits of heaven as brutish things
And cruel. The wise may hear thee, and guess all!
  And Cypris must take ship—fantastical!
Sail with my son and enter at the gate
To seek thee! Had she willed it, she had sate
At peace in heaven, and wafted thee, and all
Amyclae with thee, under Ilion's wall
  My son was passing beautiful, beyond
His peers; and thine own heart, that saw and conned
His face, became a spirit enchanting thee.
For all wild things that in mortality
Have being, are Aphrodite; and the name
She bears in heaven is born and writ of them.
  Thou sawest him in gold and orient vest
Shining, and lo, a fire about thy breast
Leapt! Thou hadst fed upon such little things,
Pacing thy ways in Argos. But now wings
Were come! Once free from Sparta, and there rolled
The Ilian glory, like broad streams of gold,
To steep thine arms and splash the towers! How small,
How cold that day was Menelaus' hall!
  Enough of that. It was by force my son
Took thee, thou sayst, and striving. . . . Yet not one
In Sparta knew! No cry, no sudden prayer
Rang from thy rooms that night. . . . Castor was there
To hear thee, and his brother: both true men,
Not yet among the stars! And after, when
Thou camest here to Troy, and in thy track

Argos and all its anguish and the rack
Of war—Ah God!—perchance men told thee 'Now
The Greek prevails in battle': then wouldst thou
Praise Menelaus, that my son might smart,
Striving with that old image in a heart
Uncertain still. Then Troy had victories:
And this Greek was as naught! Alway thine eyes
Watched Fortune's eyes, to follow hot where she
Led first. Thou wouldst not follow Honesty.
Thy secret ropes, thy body swung to fall
Far, like a desperate prisoner, from the wall!
Who found thee so? When wast thou taken? Nay,
Hadst thou no surer rope, no sudden way
Of the sword, that any woman honest-souled
Had sought long since, loving her lord of old?
Often and often did I charge thee; 'Go,
My daughter; go thy ways. My sons will know
New loves. I will give aid, and steal thee past
The Argive watch. O give us peace at last,
Us and our foes!' But out thy spirit cried
As at a bitter word. Thou hadst thy pride
In Alexander's house, and O, 'twas sweet
To hold proud Easterns bowing at thy feet.
They were great things to thee! . . . And comest thou now
Forth, and hast decked thy bosom and thy brow,
And breathest with thy lord the same blue air,
Thou evil heart? Low, low, with ravaged hair,
Rent raiment, and flesh shuddering, and within—
O shame at last, not glory for thy sin;
So face him if thou canst! . . . Lo, I have done.
Be true, O King; let Hellas bear her crown
Of Justice. Slay this woman, and upraise
The law for evermore: she that betrays
Her husband's bed, let her be judged and die.

LEADER

Be strong, O King; give judgment worthily
For thee and thy great house. Shake off thy long
Reproach; not weak, but iron against the wrong!

MENELAUS

Thy thought doth walk with mine in one intent.
'Tis sure; her heart was willing, when she went

Forth to a stranger's bed. And all her fair
Tale of enchantment, 'tis a thing of air! . . .
(*Turning furiously upon* HELEN)
Out woman! There be those that seek thee yet
With stones! Go, meet them. So shall thy long debt
Be paid at last. And ere this night is o'er
Thy dead face shall dishonour me no more!

HELEN (*kneeling before him and embracing him*)
Behold, mine arms are wreathed about thy knees;
Lay not upon my head the phantasies
Of Heaven. Remember all, and slay me not!

HECUBA
Remember them she murdered, them that fought
Beside thee, and their children! Hear that prayer!

MENELAUS
Peace, agèd woman, peace! 'Tis not for her;
She is as naught to me.
(*To the Soldiers*) . . . March on before,
Ye ministers, and tend her to the shore . . .
And have some chambered galley set for her,
Where she may sail the seas.

HECUBA
If thou be there,
I charge thee, let not her set foot therein!

MENELAUS
How? Shall the ship go heavier for her sin?

HECUBA
A lover once, will always love again.

MENELAUS
If that he loved be evil, he will fain
Hate it! . . . Howbeit, thy pleasure shall be done.
Some other ship shall bear her, not mine own. . . .
Thou counsellest very well . . . And when we come
To Argos, then . . . O then some pitiless doom
Well-earned, black as her heart! One that shall bind
Once for all time the law on womankind
Of faithfulness! . . . 'Twill be no easy thing,
God knoweth. But the thought thereof shall fling

A chill on the dreams of women, though they be
Wilder of wing and loathèd more than she!
(*Exit, following* HELEN, *who is escorted by the Soldiers.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Some Women

strophe 1

And hast thou turned from the Altar of frankincense,
And given to the Greek thy temple of Ilion?
The flame of the cakes of corn, is it gone from hence,
The myrrh on the air and the wreathèd towers gone?
And Ida, dark Ida, where the wild ivy grows,
The glens that run as rivers from the summer-broken snows,
And the Rock, is it forgotten, where the first sunbeam glows,
The lit house most holy of the Dawn?

Others

antistrophe 1

The sacrifice is gone and the sound of joy,
The dancing under the stars and the night-long prayer:
The Golden Images and the Moons of Troy,
The twelve Moons and the mighty names they bear:
My heart, my heart crieth, O Lord Zeus on high,
Were they all to thee as nothing, thou thronèd in the sky,
Thronèd in the fire-cloud, where a City, near to die,
Passeth in the wind and the flare?

A Woman

strophe 2

Dear one, O husband mine,
Thou in the dim dominions
Driftest with waterless lips,
Unburied; and me the ships
Shall bear o'er the bitter brine,
Storm-birds upon angry pinions,
Where the towers of the Giants shine
O'er Argos cloudily,
And the riders ride by the sea.

Others

And children still in the Gate
Crowd and cry,
A multitude desolate,
Voices that float and wait

As the tears run dry:
'Mother, alone on the shore
They drive me, far from thee:
Lo, the dip of the oar,
The black hull on the sea!
Is it the Isle Immortal,
Salamis, waits for me?
Is it the Rock that broods
Over the sundered floods
Of Corinth, the ancient portal
Of Pelops' sovranty?'

A Woman

antistrophe 2

Out in the waste of foam,
Where rideth dark Menelaus,
Come to us there, O white
And jagged, with wild sea-light
And crashing of oar-blades, come,
O thunder of God, and slay us:
While our tears are wet for home,
While out in the storm go we,
Slaves of our enemy!

Others

And, God, may Helen be there,
With mirror of gold,
Decking her face so fair,
Girl-like; and hear, and stare,
And turn death-cold:
Never, ah, never more
The hearth of her home to see,
Nor sand of the Spartan shore,
Nor tombs where her fathers be,
Nor Athena's bronzen Dwelling,
Nor the towers of Pitane;
For her face was a dark desire
Upon Greece, and shame like fire,
And her dead are welling, welling,
From red Simois to the sea!

(TALTHYBIUS, *followed by one or two Soldiers and bearing the child* ASTYANAX *dead, is seen approaching.*)

LEADER

Ah, change on change! Yet each one racks
This land with evil manifold;
Unhappy wives of Troy, behold,
They bear the dead Astyanax,
Our prince, whom bitter Greeks this hour
Have hurled to death from Ilion's tower.

TALTHYBIUS

One galley, Hecuba, there lingereth yet,
Lapping the wave, to gather the last freight
Of Pyrrhus' spoils for Thessaly. The chief
Himself long since hath parted, much in grief
For Peleus' sake, his grandsire, whom, men say,
Acastus, Pelias' son, in war array
Hath driven to exile. Loath enough before
Was he to linger, and now goes the more
In haste, bearing Andromache, his prize.
'Tis she hath charmed these tears into mine eyes,
Weeping her fatherland, as o'er the wave
She gazed, and speaking words to Hector's grave.
Howbeit, she prayed us that due rites be done
For burial of this babe, thine Hector's son,
That now from Ilion's tower is fallen and dead.
And, lo! this great bronze-fronted shield, the dread
Of many a Greek, that Hector held in fray,
O never in God's name—so did she pray—
Be this borne forth to hang in Peleus' hall
Or that dark bridal chamber, that the wall
May hurt her eyes; but here, in Troy o'erthrown,
Instead of cedar wood and vaulted stone,
Be this her child's last house. . . . And in thine hands
She bade me lay him, to be swathed in bands
Of death and garments, such as rest to thee
In these thy fallen fortunes; seeing that she
Hath gone her ways, and, for her master's haste,
May no more fold the babe unto his rest.
Howbeit, so soon as he is garlanded
And robed, we will heap earth above his head
And lift our sails. . . . See all be swiftly done,
As thou art bidden. I have saved thee one
Labour. For as I passed Scamander's stream
Hard by, I let the waters run on him,

And cleansed his wounds.—See, I will go forth now
And break the hard earth for his grave: so thou
And I will haste together, to set free
Our oars at last to beat the homeward sea!
(*He goes out with his Soldiers, leaving the body of the Child in* HECUBA'S *arms.*)

HECUBA

Set the great orb of Hector's shield to lie
Here on the ground. 'Tis bitter that mine eye
Should see it. . . . O ye Argives, was your spear
Keen, and your hearts so low and cold, to fear
This babe? 'Twas a strange murder for brave men!
For fear this babe some day might raise again
His fallen land! Had ye so little pride?
While Hector fought, and thousands at his side,
Ye smote us, and we perished; and now, now,
When all are dead and Ilion lieth low,
Ye dread this innocent! I deem it not
Wisdom, that rage of fear that hath no thought. . . .
Ah, what a death hath found thee, little one!
Hadst thou but fallen fighting, hadst thou known
Strong youth and love and all the majesty
Of godlike kings, then had we spoken of thee
As of one blessèd . . . could in any wise
These days know blessedness. But now thine eyes
Have seen, thy lips have tasted, but thy soul
No knowledge had nor usage of the whole
Rich life that lapt thee round. . . . Poor little child!
Was it our ancient wall, the circuit piled
By loving Gods, so savagely hath rent
Thy curls, these little flowers innocent
That were thy mother's garden, where she laid
Her kisses; here, just where the bone-edge frayed
Grins white above—Ah heaven, I will not see!
Ye tender arms, the same dear mould have ye
As his; how from the shoulder loose ye drop
And weak! And dear proud lips, so full of hope
And closed for ever! What false words ye said
At daybreak, when he crept into my bed,
Called me kind names, and promised: 'Grandmother,
When thou art dead, I will cut close my hair
And lead out all the captains to ride by

Thy tomb.' Why didst thou cheat me so? 'Tis I,
Old, homeless, childless, that for thee must shed
Cold tears, so young, so miserably dead.
Dear God, the pattering welcomes of thy feet,
The nursing in my lap; and O, the sweet
Falling asleep together! All is gone.
How should a poet carve the funeral stone
To tell thy story true? 'There lieth here
A babe whom the Greeks feared, and in their fear
Slew him.' Aye, Greece will bless the tale it tells!
Child, they have left thee beggared of all else
In Hector's house; but one thing shalt thou keep,
This war-shield bronzen-barred, wherein to sleep.
Alas, thou guardian true of Hector's fair
Left arm, how art thou masterless! And there
I see his handgrip printed on thy hold;
And deep stains of the precious sweat, that rolled
In battle from the brows and beard of him,
Drop after drop, are writ about thy rim.
Go, bring them—such poor garments hazardous
As these days leave. God hath not granted us
Wherewith to make much pride. But all I can,
I give thee, Child of Troy.—O vain is man,
Who glorieth in his joy and hath no fears:
While to and fro the chances of the years
Dance like an idiot in the wind! And none
By any strength hath his own fortune won.
(*During these lines several Women are seen approaching with garlands and raiment in their hands.*)

LEADER

Lo these, who bear thee raiment harvested
From Ilion's slain, to fold upon the dead.
(*During the following scene* HECUBA *gradually takes the garments and wraps them about the Child.*)

HECUBA

O not in pride for speeding of the car
Beyond thy peers, not for the shaft of war
True aimed, as Phrygians use; not any prize
Of joy for thee, nor splendour in men's eyes,
Thy father's mother lays these offerings
About thee, from the many fragrant things
That were all thine of old. But now no more.

One woman, loathed of God, hath broke the door
And robbed thy treasure-house, and thy warm breath
Made cold, and trod thy people down to death!

CHORUS

Some Women

Deep in the heart of me
I feel thine hand,
Mother: and is it he
Dead here, our prince to be,
And lord of the land?

HECUBA

Glory of Phrygian raiment, which my thought
Kept for thy bridal day with some far-sought
Queen of the East, folds thee for evermore.
And thou, grey Mother, Mother-Shield that bore

A thousand days of glory, thy last crown
Is here. . . . Dear Hector's shield! Thou shalt lie down
Undying with the dead, and lordlier there
Than all the gold Odysseus' breast can bear,
The evil and the strong!

CHORUS

Some Women

Child of the Shield-bearer,
Alas, Hector's child!
Great Earth, the All-mother,
Taketh thee unto her
With wailing wild!

Others

Mother of misery,
Give Death his song!

HECUBA

(Woe!)

Others

Aye and bitterly

HECUBA

(Woe!)

Others

We too weep for thee,
And the infinite wrong!
(*During these lines* HECUBA, *kneeling by the body, has been performing a funeral rite, symbolically staunching the dead Child's wounds.*)

HECUBA

I make thee whole;
I bind thy wounds, O little vanished soul.
This wound and this I heal with linen white:
O emptiness of aid! . . . Yet let the rite
Be spoken. This and . . . Nay, not I, but he,
Thy father far away shall comfort thee!
(*She bows her head to the ground and remains motionless and unseeing.*)

CHORUS

Beat, beat thine head:
Beat with the wailing chime
Of hands lifted in time:
Beat and bleed for the dead.
Woe is me for the dead!

HECUBA

O Women! Ye, mine own . . .
(*She rises bewildered, as though she had seen a vision.*)

LEADER

Hecuba, speak!
Thine are we all. Oh, ere thy bosom break . . .

HECUBA

Lo, I have seen the open hand of God;
And in it nothing, nothing, save the rod
Of mine affliction, and the eternal hate,
Beyond all lands, chosen and lifted great
For Troy! Vain, vain were prayer and incense-swell
And bulls' blood on the altars! . . . All is well.
Had He not turned us in His hand, and thrust
Our high things low and shook our hills as dust,
We had not been this splendour, and our wrong
An everlasting music for the song

Of earth and heaven!
Go, women: lay our dead
In his low sepulchre. He hath his meed
Of robing. And, methinks, but little care
Toucheth the tomb, if they that moulder there
Have rich encerement. 'Tis we, 'tis we,
That dream, we living and our vanity!
(*The Women bear out the dead Child upon the shield, singing, when presently flames of fire and dim forms are seen among the ruins of the City.*)

CHORUS

Some Women

Woe for the mother that bare thee, child,
Thread so frail of a hope so high,
That Time hath broken: and all men smiled
About thy cradle, and, passing by,
Spoke of thy father's majesty.
Low, low, thou liest!

Others

Ha! Who be these on the crested rock?
Fiery hands in the dusk, and a shock
Of torches flung! What lingereth still,
O wounded City, of unknown ill,
Ere yet thou diest?

TALTHYBIUS (*coming out through the ruined wall*)

Ye Captains that have charge to wreck this keep
Of Priam's City, let your torches sleep
No more! Up, fling the fire into her heart!
Then have we done with Ilion, and may part
In joy to Hellas from this evil land.
And ye—so hath one word two faces—stand,
Daughters of Troy, till on your ruined wall
The echo of my master's trumpet call
In signal breaks: then, forward to the sea,
Where the long ships lie waiting.
And for thee,
O ancient woman most unfortunate,
Follow: Odysseus' men be here, and wait
To guide thee. . . . 'Tis to him thou go'st for thrall.

HECUBA

Ah, me! and is it come, the end of all,
The very crest and summit of my days?
I go forth from my land, and all its ways
Are filled with fire! Bear me, O aged feet,
A little nearer: I must gaze, and greet
My poor town ere she fall.
Farewell, farewell!
O thou whose breath was mighty on the swell
Of orient winds, my Troy! Even thy name
Shall soon be taken from thee. Lo, the flame
Hath thee, and we, thy children, pass away
To slavery . . . God! O God of mercy! . . . Nay:
Why call I on the Gods? They know, they know,
My prayers, and would not hear them long ago.
Quick, to the flames! O, in thine agony,
My Troy, mine own, take me to die with thee!
(*She springs toward the flames, but is seized and held by the Soldiers.*)

TALTHYBIUS

Back! Thou art drunken with thy miseries,
Poor woman!—Hold her fast, men, till it please
Odysseus that she come. She was his lot
Chosen from all and portioned. Lose her not!
(*He goes to watch over the burning of the City. The dusk deepens.*)

CHORUS

Divers Women

Woe, woe, woe!
Thou of the Ages, O wherefore fleëst thou,
Lord of the Phrygian, Father that made us?
'Tis we, thy children; shall no man aid us?
'Tis we, thy children! Seëst thou, seëst thou?

Others

He seëth, only his heart is pitiless;
And the land dies: yéa, she,
She of the Mighty Cities perisheth citiless!
Troy shall no more be!

Others

Woe, woe, woe!
Ilion shineth afar!
Fire in the deeps thereof,
Fire in the heights above,
And crested walls of War!

Others

As smoke on the wing of heaven
Climbeth and scattereth,
Torn of the spear and driven,
The land crieth for death:
O stormy battlements that red fire hath riven,
And the sword's angry breath!

(*A new thought comes to* HECUBA; *she kneels and beats the earth with her hands.*)

HECUBA

strophe

O Earth, Earth of my children; hearken! and O mine own,
Ye have hearts and forget not, ye in the darkness lying!

LEADER

Now hast thou found thy prayer, crying to them that are gone.

HECUBA

Surely my knees are weary, but I kneel above your head;
Hearken, O ye so silent! My hands beat your bed!

LEADER

I, I am near thee;
I kneel to thy dead to hear thee,
Kneel to mine own in the darkness; O husband, hear my crying!

HECUBA

Even as the beasts they drive, even as the loads they bear,

LEADER

(Pain; O pain!)

HECUBA

We go to the house of bondage. Hear, ye dead, O hear!

LEADER

(Go, and come not again!)

HECUBA

Priam, mine own Priam,
Lying so lowly,
Thou in thy nothingness,
Shelterless, comfortless,
See'st thou the thing I am?
Know'st thou my bitter stress?

LEADER

Nay, thou art naught to him!
Out of the strife there came,
Out of the noise and shame,
Making his eyelids dim,
Death, the Most Holy!
(*The fire and smoke rise constantly higher.*)

HECUBA

antistrophe

O high houses of Gods, belovèd streets of my birth,
Ye have found the way of the sword, the fiery and blood-red river!

LEADER

Fall, and men shall forget you! Ye shall lie in the gentle earth.

HECUBA

The dust as smoke riseth; it spreadeth wide its wing;
It maketh me as a shadow, and my City a vanished thing!

LEADER

Out on the smoke she goeth,
And her name no man knoweth;
And the cloud is northward, southward; Troy is gone for ever!
(*A great crash is heard, and the Wall is lost in smoke and darkness.*)

HECUBA

Ha! Marked ye? Heard ye? The crash of the towers that fall!

LEADER

All is gone!

HECUBA

Wrath in the earth and quaking and a flood that sweepeth all,

LEADER

And passeth on!

(*The Greek trumpet sounds.*)

HECUBA

Farewell!—O spirit grey,
Whatso is coming,
Fail not from under me.
Weak limbs, why tremble ye?
Forth where the new long day
Dawneth to slavery!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Farewell from parting lips,
Farewell!—Come, I and thou,
Whatso may wait us now,
Forth to the long Greek ships
And the sea's foaming.

(*The trumpet sounds again, and the Women go out in the darkness.*)

1. The lesser Ajax, son of Oileus, as Murray points out in his note to these lines, ravished or attempted to ravish Cassandra while she was clinging to the image of Pallas. This was one of the sins perpetrated during the capture of Troy which, according to the legend, brought down the anger of the gods upon the Greeks.

2. Cassandra had in her charge the sacred keys of the god's "Holy Place," as Murray calls it.

3. Cassandra here foresees the doom of the house of Atreus.

4. *i.e.*, the three Erinyes or Furies.

5. This thought, traditionally supposed to have been first expressed by Solon, appears frequently in Greek tragedy. Cf., *e.g.*, the last lines of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*.

6. *i.e.*, Athena.

7. Murray's note to this passage reads: "This very beautiful scene is perhaps marred to most modern readers by an element which is merely a part of the convention of ancient mourning. Each of the mourners cries, 'There is no affliction like mine!' and then proceeds to argue, as it were, against the other's counter claim. One can only say that it was, after all, what they expected of each other; and I believe the same convention exists in most places where keening or wailing is an actual practice."

8. Murray supplies here some words which seem to be missing in the Greek.

9. Murray prints in his notes the following argument of this lyric: "This is not the first time Troy has been taken. Long ago Heracles made war against the old king Laomedon, because he had not given him the immortal steeds that he promised. And Telamon joined him; Telamon who might have been happy in his island of Salamis, among the bees and the pleasant waters, looking over the strait to the olive-laden hills of Athens, the beloved City. And they took ship and slew Laomedon. Yea, twice Zeus has destroyed Ilion.

"(Second part) Is it all in vain that our Trojan princes have been loved by the Gods? Ganymedes pours the nectar of Zeus in his banquets, his face never troubled, though his motherland is burned with fire. And, to

say nothing of Zeus, how can the Goddess of Morning rise and shine upon us uncaring? She loved Tithonus, son of Laomedon, and bore him up from us in a chariot to be her husband in the skies. But all that once made them love us is gone."

10. Murray's note here reads: "Hecuba, just before Paris' birth, dreamed that she gave birth to a firebrand. The prophets therefore advised that the babe should be killed; but Priam disobeyed them."

IX
HERACLES

Characters in the Play

Amphitryon, *husband of Alcmena, the mother of* Heracles
Megara, *wife of* Heracles, *daughter of Creon*
Lycus, *unlawful King of Thebes*
Iris
Madness
Messenger
Heracles, *son of Zeus and Alcmena*
Theseus, *King of Athens*
Chorus of Old Men of Thebes
Sons of Heracles, *guards, attendants*

INTRODUCTION

SCHOLARS have been completely unable to determine the date of the *Heracles*. Euripides has chosen a version of the legend which connects Heracles and Theseus, and explains in some measure why their worship was combined in a number of Attic cults. This circumstance would point to a date somewhere in the neighbourhood of 420 B.C., since in the play Heracles' connection with Athens seems to be exploited in order to reflect greater glory upon the city and her claims to supremacy. It therefore seems natural to suppose that Euripides wrote his play prior to the period during which he gradually lost his faith in Athens. On the other hand there have been some who believe that the piece was composed late in the poet's life. This theory is based largely upon the famous chorus on old age (lines 637–700), which seems to bespeak authorship by a person advanced in years. As a matter of fact, there have been critics who have even seen in the *Heracles* a close counterpart to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus,* with which the play has been compared. When one examines the conflicting claims of these two theories, it becomes immediately evident why the problem of the play's date has never been satisfactorily settled.

As has already been indicated, the legends of Heracles took several different forms. Euripides did not choose to follow the version which Sophocles adopted for *The Trachiniae,* but rather took over the so-called Theban account, which is somewhat less romantic. The prologue of the play, spoken by Amphitryon, the reputed father of Heracles, gives in great detail all the requisite information concerning the events prior to the dramatic action. There is presented a rather exhaustive account of the genealogical situation and then we are told that Heracles has not yet returned from his last and most difficult labour, his mission to Hades to bring back Cerberus. We learn likewise that in Heracles' absence a certain Lycus has usurped the royal power of Thebes, and is now on the point of slaying Amphitryon, Heracles' wife Megara, and the hero's children. The play records how Heracles returned, rescued his family, slew Lycus, but then was visited with a dread madness and in his frenzy slew likewise his wife and children.

The *Heracles* shares with several other Euripidean tragedies the characteristic of falling into two parts which are somewhat inadequately knit together. In this play the fault does not seem to be so glaring, because the character of Heracles dominates the entire drama, giving it at least a modicum of unity. Certainly the contrast between Heracles' triumph and his cataclysmic downfall, which immediately follows, intensifies to the extreme the impact of the play. Furthermore, the *Heracles* becomes more unified because of the stress laid upon the religious implications of the dramatic situation. Though unmitigated in his hatred for Hera, Heracles at the end of the play seems to have reached a somewhat purified religious position. He does not commit suicide, for he feels that to be a coward's course. Influenced by the counsels of Theseus, he determines to live on, courageously to endure the blows of fate, and to face fully the responsibility for his deeds. He makes this decision after having contemptuously rejected the anthropomorphism in the conventional religion, while at the same time he maintains, so far as we can tell, a belief in a higher, better deity behind the universe, inscrutable in his ways to man, but who has decreed that it is the part of a man to endure life. When Euripides presents Heracles in these terms, he completes his portrait of a great tragic character.

HERACLES

(SCENE:—*Before the palace of* HERACLES *at Thebes. Nearby stands the altar of Zeus, on the steps of which are now seated* AMPHITRYON, MEGARA *and her sons by* HERACLES. *They are seeking refuge at the altar.*)

AMPHITRYON

WHAT mortal hath not heard of him who shared a wife with Zeus, Amphitryon of Argos, whom on a day Alcaeus, son of Perseus, begat, Amphitryon the father of Heracles? He it was dwelt here in Thebes, where from the sowing of the dragon's teeth grew up a crop of earth-born giants; for of these Ares saved a scanty band, and their children's children people the city of Cadmus. Hence sprung Creon, son of Menoeceus, king of this land; and Creon became the father of this lady Megara, whom once all Cadmus' race escorted with the glad music of lutes at her wedding, in the day that Heracles, illustrious chief, led her to my halls. Now he, my son, left Thebes where I was settled, left his wife Megara and her kin, eager to make his home in Argolis, in that walled town which the Cyclopes built, whence I am exiled for the slaying of Electryon; so he, wishing to lighten my affliction and to find a home in his own land, did offer Eurystheus a mighty price for my recall, even to free the world of savage monsters, whether it was that Hera goaded him to submit to this, or that fate was leagued against him. Divers are the toils he hath accomplished, and last of all hath he passed through the mouth of Taenarus into the halls of Hades to drag to the light that hound with bodies three, and thence is he never returned. Now there is an ancient legend amongst the race of Cadmus, that one Lycus in days gone by was husband to Dirce, being king of this city with its seven towers, before that Amphion and Zethus, sons of Zeus, lords of the milk-white steeds, became rulers in the land. His son, called by the same name as his father, albeit no Theban but a stranger from Euboea, slew Creon, and after that seized the government, having fallen on this city when weakened by dissension. So this connection with Creon is likely to prove to us a serious evil; for now that my son is in the bowels of the earth, this illustrious monarch Lycus is bent on extirpating the children of Heracles, to quench one bloody feud with

another, likewise his wife and me, if useless age like mine is to rank amongst men, that the boys may never grow up to exact a blood-penalty of their uncle's family. So I, left here by my son, whilst he is gone into the pitchy darkness of the earth, to tend and guard his children in his house, am taking my place with their mother, that the race of Heracles may not perish, here at the altar of Zeus the Saviour, which my own gallant child set up to commemorate his glorious victory over the Minyae. And here we are careful to keep our station, though in need of everything, of food, of drink, and raiment, huddled together on the hard bare ground; for we are barred out from our house and sit here for want of any other safety. As for friends, some I see are insincere; while others, who are staunch, have no power to help us further. This is what misfortune means to man; God grant it may never fall to the lot of any who bears the least goodwill to me, to apply this never-failing test of friendship!

MEGARA

Old warrior, who erst did raze the citadel of the Taphians leading on the troops of Thebes to glory, how uncertain are God's dealings with man! For I, as far as concerned my sire was never an outcast of fortune, for he was once accounted a man of might by reason of his wealth, possessed as he was of royal power, for which long spears are launched at the lives of the fortunate through love of it; children too he had; and me did he betroth to thy son, matching me in glorious marriage with Heracles. Whereas now all that is dead and gone from us; and I and thou, old friend, art doomed to die, and these children of Heracles, whom I am guarding 'neath my wing as a bird keepeth her tender chicks under her. And they the while in turn keep asking me, "Mother, whither is our father gone from the land? what is he about? when will he return?" Thus they inquire for their father, in childish perplexity; while I put them off with excuses, inventing stories; but still I wonder if 'tis he whenever a door creaks on its hinges, and up they all start, thinking to embrace their father's knees. What hope or way of salvation art thou now devising, old friend? for to thee I look. We can never steal beyond the boundaries of the land unseen, for there is too strict a watch set on us at every outlet, nor have we any longer hopes of safety in our friends. Whatever thy scheme is, declare it, lest our death be made ready, while we are only prolonging the time, powerless to escape.

AMPHITRYON

'Tis by no means easy, my daughter, to give one's earnest advice on such matters easily, without weary thought.

MEGARA

Dost need a further taste of grief, or cling so fast to life?

AMPHITRYON

Yes, I love this life, and cling to its hopes.

MEGARA

So do I; but it boots not to expect the unexpected, old friend.

AMPHITRYON

In these delays is left the only cure for our evils.

MEGARA

'Tis the pain of that interval I feel so.

AMPHITRYON

Daughter, there may yet be a happy escape from present troubles for me and thee; my son, thy husband, may yet arrive. So calm thyself, and wipe those tears from thy children's eyes, and soothe them with soft words, inventing a tale to delude them, piteous though such fraud be. Yea, for men's misfortunes ofttimes flag, and the stormy wind doth not always blow so strong, nor are the prosperous ever so; for all things change, making way for each other. The bravest man is he who relieth ever on his hopes, but despair is the mark of a coward.

(*The* CHORUS OF OLD MEN OF THEBES *enters.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe

To the sheltering roof, to the old man's couch, leaning on my staff have I set forth, chanting a plaintive dirge like some bird grown grey, I that am but a voice and nothing more, a fancy bred of the visions of sleep by night, palsied with age, yet meaning kindly. All hail! ye orphaned babes! all hail, old friend! thou too, unhappy mother, wailing for thy husband in the halls of Hades!

antistrophe

Faint not too soon upon your way, nor let your limbs grow weary, even as a colt beneath the yoke grows weary as he mounts some stony hill, dragging the weight of a wheeled car. Take hold of hand or robe, whoso feels his footsteps falter. Old friend, escort another like thyself, who erst amid his toiling peers in the days of our youth would take his place beside thee, no blot upon his country's glorious record.

See, how like their father's sternly flash these children's eyes! Misfortune, God wot, hath not failed his children, nor yet hath his comeliness been denied them. O Hellas! if thou lose these, of what allies wilt thou rob thyself!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But I see Lycus, the ruler of this land, drawing near the house.

(LYCUS *and his attendants enter.*)

LYCUS

One question, if I may, to this father of Heracles and his wife; and certainly as your lord and master I have a right to put what questions I choose. How long do ye seek to prolong your lives? What hope, what succour do ye see to save you from death? Do you trust that these children's father, who lies dead in the halls of Hades, will return? How unworthily ye show your sorrow at having to die, thou (*to* AMPHITRYON) after thy idle boasts, scattered broadcast through Hellas, that Zeus was partner in thy marriage-bed and there begat a new god; and thou (*to* MEGARA) after calling thyself the wife of so peerless a lord.

After all, what was the fine exploit thy husband achieved, if he *did* kill a hydra in a marsh or that monster of Nemea? which he caught in a snare, for all he says he strangled it to death in his arms. Are these your weapons for the hard struggle? Is it for this then that Heracles' children should be spared? a man who has won a reputation for valour in his contests with beasts, in all else a weakling; who ne'er buckled shield to arm nor faced the spear, but with a bow, that coward's weapon, was ever ready to run away. Archery is no test of manly bravery; no! he *is* a man who keeps his post in the ranks and steadily faces the swift wound the spear may plough. My policy, again, old man, shows no reckless cruelty, but caution; for I am well aware I slew Creon, the father of Megara, and am in possession of his throne. So I have no wish that these children should grow up and be left to take vengeance on me in requital for what I have done.

AMPHITRYON

As for Zeus, let Zeus defend his son's case; but as for me, Heracles, I am only anxious on thy behalf to prove by what I say this tyrant's ignorance; for I cannot allow thee to be ill spoken of. First then for that which should never have been said,—for to speak of thee Heracles as a coward is, methinks, outside the pale of speech,—of that must I clear thee with heaven to witness. I appeal then to the thunder of Zeus, and the chariot wherein he rode, when he pierced the giants, earth's brood, to the heart with his winged shafts, and with gods uplifted the glorious triumph-song; or go to Pholoe and ask the insolent tribe of four-legged Centaurs, thou craven king, ask them who they would judge their bravest foe; will they not say my son, who according to thee is but a pretender? Wert thou to ask Euboean Dirphys, thy native place, it would nowise sing thy praise, for thou hast never done a single gallant deed to which thy country can witness. Next thou dost disparage that clever invention, an archer's

weapon; come, listen to me and learn wisdom. A man who fights in line is a slave to his weapons, and if his fellow-comrades want for courage he is slain himself through the cowardice of his neighbours, or, if he break his spear, he has not wherewithal to defend his body from death, having only one means of defence; whereas all who are armed with the trusty bow, though they have but one weapon, yet is it the best; for a man, after discharging countless arrows, still has others wherewith to defend himself from death, and standing at a distance keeps off the enemy, wounding them for all their watchfulness with shafts invisible, and never exposing himself to the foe, but keeping under cover; and this is far the wisest course in battle, to harm the enemy, if they are not stationed out of shot, and keep safe oneself. These arguments are completely opposite to thine with regard to the point at issue. Next, why art thou desirous of slaying these children? What have they done to thee? One piece of wisdom I credit thee with, thy coward terror of a brave man's descendants. Still it is hard on us, if for thy cowardice we must die; a fate that ought to have overtaken thee at our braver hands, if Zeus had been fairly disposed towards us. But, if thou art so anxious to make thyself supreme in the land, let us at least go into exile; abstain from all violence, else thou wilt suffer by it whenso the deity causes fortune's breeze to veer round.

Ah! thou land of Cadmus,—for to thee too will I turn, upbraiding thee with words of reproach,—is this your succour of Heracles and his children? the man who faced alone the Minyan host in battle and allowed Thebes to see the light with freemen's eyes. I cannot praise Hellas, nor will I ever keep silence, finding her so craven as regards my son; she should have come with fire and sword and warrior's arms to help these tender babes, to requite him for all his labours in purging land and sea. Such help, my children, neither Hellas nor the city of Thebes affords you; to me a feeble friend ye look, that am but empty sound and nothing more. For the vigour which once I had, is gone from me; my limbs are palsied with age, and my strength is decayed. Were I but young and still a man of my hands, I would have seized my spear and dabbled those flaxen locks of his with blood, so that the coward would now be flying from my prowess beyond the bounds of Atlas.

LEADER

Have not the brave amongst mankind a fair opening for speech, albeit slow to begin?

LYCUS

Say what thou wilt of me in thy exalted phrase, but I by deeds will make thee rue those words. (*Calling to his servants*) Ho! bid wood-cutters go, some to Helicon, others to the glens of Parnassus, and cut me logs of oak, and when they are brought to the town, pile up a stack of wood all

round the altar on either side thereof, and set fire to it and burn them all alive, that they may learn that the dead no longer rules this land, but that for the present I am king. (*angrily to the* CHORUS) As for you, old men, since ye thwart my views, not for the children of Heracles alone shall ye lament, but likewise for every blow that strikes his house, and ye shall ne'er forget ye are slaves and I your prince.

LEADER

Ye sons of Earth, whom Ares on a day did sow, when from the dragon's ravening jaw he had torn the teeth, up with your staves, whereon ye lean your hands, and dash out this miscreant's brains! a fellow who, without even being a Theban, but a foreigner, lords it shamefully o'er the younger folk; but *my* master shalt thou never be to thy joy, nor shalt thou reap the harvest of all my toil; begone with my curse upon thee! carry thy insolence back to the place whence it came. For never whilst I live, shalt thou slay these sons of Heracles; not so deep beneath the earth hath their father disappeared from his children's ken. Thou art in possession of this land which thou hast ruined, while he its benefactor has missed his just reward; and yet do I take too much upon myself because I help those I love after their death, when most they need a friend? Ah! right hand, how fain wouldst thou wield the spear, but thy weakness is a death-blow to thy fond desire; for then had I stopped thee calling me slave, and I would have governed Thebes, wherein thou art now exulting, with credit; for a city sick with dissension and evil counsels thinketh not aright; otherwise it would never have accepted thee as its master.

MEGARA

Old sirs, I thank you; 'tis right that friends should feel virtuous indignation on behalf of those they love; but do not on our account vent your anger on the tyrant to your own undoing. Hear my advice, Amphitryon, if haply there appear to thee to be aught in what I say. I love my children; strange if I did not love those whom I laboured to bring forth! Death I count a dreadful fate; but the man who wrestles with necessity I esteem a fool. Since we must die, let us do so without being burnt alive, to furnish our foes with food for merriment, which to my mind is an evil worse than death; for many a fair guerdon do we owe our family. Thine has ever been a warrior's fair fame, so 'tis not to be endured that thou shouldst die a coward's death; and my husband's reputation needs no one to witness that he would ne'er consent to save these children's lives by letting them incur the stain of cowardice; for the noble are afflicted by disgrace on account of their children, nor must I shrink from following my lord's example. As to thy hopes consider how I weigh them. Thou thinkest thy son will return from beneath the earth: who ever has come

back from the dead out of the halls of Hades? Thou hast a hope perhaps of softening this man by entreaty: no, no! better to fly from one's enemy when he is so brutish, but yield to men of breeding and wisdom; for thou wilt more easily obtain mercy there by friendly overtures. True, a thought has already occurred to me that we might by entreaty obtain a sentence of exile for the children; yet this too is misery, to compass their deliverance with dire penury as the result; for 'tis a saying that hosts look sweetly on banished friends for a day and no more. Steel thy heart to die with us, for that awaits thee after all. By thy brave soul I challenge thee, old friend; for whoso struggles hard to escape destiny shows zeal no doubt, but 'tis zeal with a taint of folly; for what must be, no one will ever avail to alter.

LEADER

If a man had insulted thee, while yet my arms were lusty, there would have been an easy way to stop him; but now am I a thing of naught; and so thou henceforth, Amphitryon, must scheme how to avert misfortune.

AMPHITRYON

'Tis not cowardice or any longing for life that hinders my dying, but my wish to save my son's children, though no doubt I am vainly wishing for impossibilities. Lo! here is my neck ready for thy sword to pierce, my body for thee to hack or hurl from the rock; only one boon I crave for both of us, O king; slay me and this hapless mother before thou slay the children, that we may not see the hideous sight, as they gasp out their lives, calling on their mother and their father's sire; for the rest work thy will, if so thou art inclined; for we have no defence against death.

MEGARA

I too implore thee add a second boon, that by thy single act thou mayst put us both under a double obligation; suffer me to deck my children in the robes of death,—first opening the palace gates, for now are we shut out,—that this at least they may obtain from their father's halls.

LYCUS

I grant it, and bid my servants undo the bolts. Go in and deck yourselves; robes I grudge not. But soon as ye have clothed yourselves, I will return to you to consign you to the nether world.

(LYCUS *and his retinue withdraw.*)

MEGARA

Children, follow the footsteps of your hapless mother to your father's halls, where others possess his substance, though his name is still ours.

(MEGARA *and her children enter the palace.*)

AMPHITRYON

O Zeus, in vain, it seems, did I get thee to share my bride with me; in vain used we to call thee father of my son. After all thou art less our friend than thou didst pretend. Great god as thou art, I, a mere mortal, surpass thee in true worth. For I did not betray the children of Heracles; but thou by stealth didst find thy way to my couch, taking another's wife without leave given, while to save thy own friends thou hast no skill. Either thou art a god of little sense, or else naturally unjust.

(AMPHITRYON *follows* MEGARA *into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Phoebus is singing a plaintive dirge to drown his happier strains, striking with key of gold his sweet-tongued lyre; so too am I fain to sing a song of praise, a crown to all his toil, concerning him who is gone to the gloom beneath the nether world, whether I am to call him son of Zeus or of Amphitryon. For the praise of noble toils accomplished is a glory to the dead. First he cleared the grove of Zeus of a lion, and put its skin upon his back, hiding his auburn hair in its fearful gaping jaws;

antistrophe 1

Then on a day, with murderous bow he wounded the race of wild Centaurs, that range the hills, slaying them with winged shafts; Peneus, the river of fair eddies, knows him well, and those far fields unharvested, and the steadings on Pelion and they who haunt the glens of Homole bordering thereupon, whence they rode forth to conquer Thessaly, arming themselves with pines for clubs; likewise he slew that dappled hind with horns of gold, that preyed upon the country-folk, glorifying Artemis, huntress queen of Oenoe;

strophe 2

Next he mounted on a car and tamed with the bit the steeds of Diomede, that greedily champed their bloody food at gory mangers with jaws unbridled, devouring with hideous joy the flesh of men; then crossing Hebrus' silver stream he still toiled on to perform the hests of the tyrant of Mycenae, till he came to the strand of the Malian gulf by the streams of Anaurus, where he slew with his arrows Cycnus, murderer of his guests, the savage wretch who dwelt in Amphanae;

antistrophe 2

Also he came to those minstrel maids, to their orchard in the west, to pluck from the leafy apple-tree its golden fruit, when he had slain

the tawny dragon, whose awful coils were twined all round to guard it; and he made his way into ocean's lairs, bringing calm to men that use the oar; moreover he sought the home of Atlas, and stretched out his hands to uphold the firmament, and on his manly shoulders took the starry mansions of the gods;

strophe 3

Then he went through the waves of heaving Euxine against the mounted host of Amazons dwelling round Maeotis, the lake that is fed by many a stream, having gathered to his standard all his friends from Hellas, to fetch the gold-embroidered raiment of the warrior queen, a deadly quest for a girdle. And Hellas won those glorious spoils of the barbarian maid, and safe in Mycenae are they now. On Lerna's murderous hound, the many-headed hydra, he set his branding-iron, and smeared its venom on his darts, wherewith he slew the shepherd of Erytheia, a monster with three bodies;

antistrophe 3

And many another glorious achievement he brought to a happy issue; to Hades' house of tears hath he now sailed, the goal of his labours, where he is ending his career of toil, nor cometh he thence again. Now is thy house left without a friend, and Charon's boat awaits thy children to bear them on that journey out of life, whence is no returning, contrary to God's law and man's justice; and it is to thy prowess that thy house is looking although thou art not here. Had I been strong and lusty, able to brandish the spear in battle's onset, my Theban compeers too, I would have stood by thy children to champion them; but now my happy youth is gone and I am left.

But lo! I see the children of Heracles who was erst so great, clad in the vesture of the grave, and his loving wife dragging her babes along at her side, and that hero's aged sire. Ah! woe is me! no longer can I stem the flood of tears that spring to my old eyes.

(MEGARA, AMPHITRYON, *and the children enter from the palace.*)

MEGARA

Come now, who is to sacrifice or butcher these poor children? or rob me of my wretched life? Behold! the victims are ready to be led to Hades' halls. O my children! an ill-matched company are we hurried off to die, old men and babes, and mothers, all together. Alas! for my sad fate and my children's, whom these eyes now for the last time behold. So I gave you birth and reared you only for our foes to mock, to flout, and slay. Ah me! how bitterly my hopes have disappointed me in the expectation I once formed from the words of your father. (*Addressing each of her sons*

in turn) To *thee* thy dead sire was for giving Argos; and thou wert to dwell in the halls of Eurystheus, lording it o'er the fair fruitful land of Argolis; and o'er thy head would he throw that lion's skin wherewith himself was girt. *Thou* wert to be king of Thebes, famed for its chariots, receiving as thy heritage my broad lands, for so thou didst coax thy father dear; and to thy hand used he to resign the carved club, his sure defence, pretending to give it thee. To *thee* he promised to give Oechalia, which once his archery had wasted. Thus with three principalities would your father exalt you his three sons, proud of your manliness; while I was choosing the best brides for you, scheming to link you by marriage to Athens, Thebes, and Sparta, that ye might live a happy life with a fast sheet-anchor to hold by. And now that is all vanished; fortune's breeze hath veered and given to you for brides the maidens of death in their stead, and tears to me to bathe them in; woe is me for my foolish thoughts! and your grandsire here is celebrating your marriage-feast, accepting Hades as the father of your brides, a grim relationship to make. Ah me! which of you shall I first press to my bosom, which last? on which bestow my kiss, or clasp close to me? Oh! would that like the bee with russet wing, I could collect from every source my sighs in one, and, blending them together, shed them in one copious flood! Heracles, dear husband mine, to thee I call, if haply mortal voice can make itself heard in Hades' halls; thy father and children are dying, and I am doomed, I who once because of thee was counted blest as men count bliss. Come to our rescue; appear, I pray, if but as a phantom, since thy mere coming would be enough, for they are cowards compared with thee, who are slaying thy children.

AMPHITRYON

Lady, do thou prepare the funeral rites; but I, O Zeus, stretching out my hand to heaven, call on thee to help these children, if such be thy intention; for soon will any aid of thine be unavailing; and yet thou hast been oft invoked; my toil is wasted; death seems inevitable. Ye aged friends, the joys of life are few; so take heed that ye pass through it as gladly as ye may, without a thought of sorrow from morn till night; for time recks little of preserving our hopes; and, when he has busied himself on his own business, away he flies. Look at me, a man who had made a mark amongst his fellows by deeds of note; yet hath fortune in a single day robbed me of it as of a feather that floats away toward the sky. I know not any whose plenteous wealth and high reputation is fixed and sure; fare ye well, for now have ye seen the last of your old friend, my comrades.

(MEGARA *catches sight of* HERACLES *approaching.*)

MEGARA

Ha! old friend, is it my own, my dearest I behold? or what am I to say?

AMPHITRYON

I know not, my daughter; I too am struck dumb.

MEGARA

Is this he who, they told us, was beneath the earth?

AMPHITRYON

'Tis he, unless some day-dream mocks our sight.

MEGARA

What am I saying? What visions do these anxious eyes behold? Old man, this is none other than thy own son. Come hither, my children, cling to your father's robe, make haste to come, never loose your hold, for here is one to help you, nowise behind our saviour Zeus.

(HERACLES *enters.*)

HERACLES

All hail! my house, and portals of my home, how glad am I to emerge to the light and see thee. Ha! what is this? I see my children before the house in the garb of death, with chaplets on their heads, and my wife amid a throng of men, and my father weeping o'er some mischance. Let me draw near to them and inquire; lady, what strange stroke of fate hath fallen on the house?

MEGARA

Dearest of all mankind to me! O ray of light appearing to thy sire! art thou safe, and is thy coming just in time to help thy dear ones?

HERACLES

What meanest thou? what is this confusion I find on my arrival, father?

MEGARA

We are being ruined; forgive me, old friend, if I have anticipated that which thou hadst a right to tell him; for woman's nature is perhaps more prone than man's to grief, and they are my children that were being led to death, which was my own lot too.

HERACLES

Great Apollo! what a prelude to thy story!

MEGARA

Dead are my brethren, dead my hoary sire.

HERACLES
How so? what befell him? who dealt the fatal blow?

MEGARA
Lycus, our splendid monarch, slew him.

HERACLES
Did he meet him in fair fight, or was the land sick and weak?

MEGARA
Aye, from faction; now is he master of the city of Cadmus with its seven gates.

HERACLES
Why hath panic fallen on thee and my aged sire?

MEGARA
He meant to kill thy father, me, and my children.

HERACLES
Why, what had he to fear from my orphan babes?

MEGARA
He was afraid they might some day avenge Creon's death.

HERACLES
What means this dress they wear, suited to the dead?

MEGARA
'Tis the garb of death we have already put on.

HERACLES
And were ye being haled to death? O woe is me!

MEGARA
Yes, deserted by every friend, and informed that thou wert dead.

HERACLES
What put such desperate thoughts into your heads?

MEGARA
That was what the heralds of Eurystheus kept proclaiming.

HERACLES
Why did ye leave my hearth and home?

MEGARA
He forced us; thy father was dragged from his bed.

HERACLES

Had he no mercy, to ill-use the old man so?

MEGARA

Mercy forsooth! that goddess and he dwell far enough apart.

HERACLES

Was I so poor in friends in my absence?

MEGARA

Who are the friends of a man in misfortune?

HERACLES

Do they make so light of my hard warring with the Minyae?

MEGARA

Misfortune, to repeat it to thee, has no friends.

HERACLES

Cast from your heads these chaplets of death, look up to the light, for instead of the nether gloom your eyes behold the welcome sun. I, meantime, since here is work for my hand, will first go raze this upstart tyrant's halls, and when I have beheaded the miscreant, I will throw him to dogs to tear; and every Theban who I find has played the traitor after my kindness, will I destroy with this victorious club; the rest will I scatter with my feathered shafts and fill Ismenus full of bloody corpses, and Dirce's clear fount shall run red with gore. For whom ought I to help rather than wife and children and aged sire? Farewell my labours! for it was in vain I accomplished them rather than succoured these. And yet I ought to die in their defence, since they for their sire were doomed; else what shall we find so noble in having fought a hydra and a lion at the hests of Eurystheus, if I make no effort to save my own children from death? No longer I trow, as heretofore, shall I be called Heracles the victor.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

'Tis only right that parents should help their children, their aged sires, and the partners of their marriage.

AMPHITRYON

My son, 'tis like thee to show thy love for thy dear ones and thy hate for all that is hostile; only curb excessive hastiness.

HERACLES

Wherein, father, am I now showing more than fitting haste?

AMPHITRYON

The king hath a host of allies, needy villains though pretending to be rich, who sowed dissension and o'erthrew the state with a view to plundering their neighbours; for the wealth they had in their houses was all spent, dissipated by their sloth. Thou wast seen entering the city; and, that being so, beware that thou bring not thy enemies together and be slain unawares.

HERACLES

Little I reck if the whole city saw me; but chancing to see a bird perched in an ill-omened spot, from it I learnt that some trouble had befallen my house; so I purposely made my entry to the land by stealth.

AMPHITRYON

For thy lucky coming hither, go salute thy household altar, and let thy father's halls behold thy face. For soon will the king be here in person to drag away thy wife and children and murder them, and to add me to the bloody list. But if thou remain on the spot all will go well, and thou wilt profit by this security; but do not rouse thy city ere thou hast these matters well in train, my son.

HERACLES

I will do so; thy advice is good; I will enter my house. After my return at length from the sunless den of Hades and the maiden queen of hell, I will not neglect to greet first of all the gods beneath my roof.

AMPHITRYON

Why, didst thou in very deed go to the house of Hades, my son?

HERACLES

Aye, and brought to the light that three-headed monster.

AMPHITRYON

Didst worst him in fight, or receive him from the goddess?

HERACLES

In fair fight; for I had been lucky enough to witness the rites of the initiated.[1]

AMPHITRYON

Is the monster really lodged in the house of Eurystheus?

HERACLES

The grove of Demeter and the city of Hermione are his prison.

AMPHITRYON

Does not Eurystheus know that thou hast returned to the upper world?

HERACLES
He knows not; I came hither first to learn your news.

AMPHITRYON
How is it thou wert so long beneath the earth?

HERACLES
I stayed awhile attempting to bring back Theseus from Hades, father.

AMPHITRYON
Where is he? gone to his native land?

HERACLES
He set out for Athens right glad to have escaped from the lower world. Come, children, attend your father to the house. My entering in is fairer in your eyes, I trow, than my going out. Take heart, and no more let the tears stream from your eyes; thou too, dear wife, collect thy courage, cease from fear; let go my robe; for I cannot fly away, nor have I any wish to flee from those I love. Ah! they do not loose their hold, but cling to my garments all the more; were ye in such jeopardy? Well, I must lead them, taking them by the hand to draw them after me, like a ship when towing; for I too do not reject the care of my children; here all mankind are equal; all love their children, both those of high estate and those who are naught; 'tis wealth that makes distinctions among them; some have, others want; but all the human race loves its offspring.
(HERACLES, MEGARA, AMPHITRYON *and the children enter the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Dear to me is youth, but old age is ever hanging o'er my head, a burden heavier than Aetna's crags, casting its pall of gloom upon my eyes. Oh! never may the wealth of Asia's kings tempt me to barter for houses stored with gold my happy youth, which is in wealth and poverty alike most fair! But old age is gloomy and deathly; I hate it; let it sink beneath the waves! Would it had never found its way to the homes and towns of mortal men, but were still drifting on for ever down the wind.

antistrophe 1

Had the gods shown discernment and wisdom, as mortals count these things, men would have gotten youth twice over, a visible mark of worth amongst whomsoever found, and after death would these have retraced their steps once more to the sun-light, while the mean man would have had but a single portion of life; and thus would it have been possible to distinguish the good and the

bad, just as sailors know the number of the stars amid the clouds. But, as it is, the gods have set no certain boundary 'twixt good and bad, but time's onward roll brings increase only to man's wealth.

strophe 2

Never will I cease to link in one the Graces and the Muses, fairest union. Never may my lines be cast among untutored boors, but ever may I find a place among the crownèd choir! Yes, still the aged bard lifts up his voice of bygone memories; still is my song of the triumphs of Heracles, whether Bromius the giver of wine is nigh, or the strains of the seven-stringed lyre and the Libyan flute are rising; not yet will I cease to sing the Muses' praise, my patrons in the dance.

antistrophe 2

As the maids of Delos raise their song of joy, circling round the temple gates in honour of Leto's fair son, the graceful dancer; so I with my old lips will sing songs of victory at thy palace-doors, a song of my old age, such as sings the dying swan; for there is a goodly theme for minstrelsy; he is the son of Zeus; yet high above his noble birth tower his deeds of prowess, for his toil secured this life of calm for man, having destroyed all fearsome beasts.

(AMPHITRYON *comes out of the palace as* LYCUS *and his retinue enter.*)

LYCUS

Ha! Amphitryon, 'tis high time thou camest forth from the palace; ye have been too long arraying yourselves in the robes and trappings of the dead. Come, bid the wife and children of Heracles show themselves outside the house, to die on the conditions you yourselves offered.

AMPHITRYON

O king, thou dost persecute me in my misery and heapest insult upon me over and above the loss of my son; thou shouldst have been more moderate in thy zeal, though thou art my lord and master. But since thou dost impose death's stern necessity on me, needs must I acquiesce and do thy will.

LYCUS

Pray, where is Megara? where are the children of Alcmena's son?

AMPHITRYON

She, I believe, so far as I can guess from outside—

LYCUS
What grounds hast thou to base thy fancy on?

AMPHITRYON
Is sitting as a suppliant on the altar's hallowed steps.

LYCUS
Imploring them quite uselessly to save her life.

AMPHITRYON
And calling on her dead husband, quite in vain.

LYCUS
He is nowhere near, and he certainly will never come.

AMPHITRYON
No, unless perhaps a god should raise him from the dead.

LYCUS
Go to her and bring her from the palace.

AMPHITRYON
By doing so I should become an accomplice in her murder.

LYCUS
Since thou hast this scruple, I, who have left fear behind, will myself bring out the mother and her children. Follow me, servants, that we may put an end to this delay of our work to our joy.

(LYCUS *and his servants enter the palace.*)

AMPHITRYON
Then go thy way along the path of fate; for what remains, maybe another will provide. Expect for thy evil deeds to find some ill thyself. Ah! my aged friends, he is marching fairly to his doom; soon will he be entangled in the snare of the sword, thinking to slay his neighbours, the villain! I will hence, to see him fall dead; for the sight of a foe being slain and paying the penalty of his misdeeds gives pleasure.

(AMPHITRYON *follows* LYCUS *into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Evil has changed sides; he who was erst a mighty king is now turning his life backward into the road to Hades.

Hail to thee! Justice and heavenly retribution.

At last hast thou reached the goal where thy death will pay the forfeit,

For thy insults against thy betters.

Joy makes my tears burst forth.

There is come a retribution, which the prince of the land never once thought in his heart would happen.

Come, old friends, let us look within to see if one we know has met the fate I hope.

LYCUS (*within*)

Ah me! ah me!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ha! how sweet to hear that opening note of his within the house; death is not far off him now.

Hark! the prince cries out in his agony; that preludes death.

LYCUS (*within*)

O kingdom of Cadmus, by treachery I am perishing!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Thou wert thyself for making others perish; endure thy retribution; 'tis only the penalty of thy own deeds thou art paying.

Who was he, weak son of man, that aimed his silly saying at the blessed gods of heaven with impious blasphemy, maintaining that they are weaklings after all?

Old friends, our godless foe is now no more.

The house is still; let us to our dancing.

Yea, for fortune smiles upon my friends as I desire.

strophe 1

Dances and banquets now prevail throughout the holy town of Thebes. For release from tears and respite from sorrow give birth to song. The upstart king is dead and gone; our former monarch now is prince, having made his way even from the bourn of Acheron. Hope beyond all expectation is fulfilled.

antistrophe 1

To heed the right and wrong is heaven's care. 'Tis their gold and their good luck that lead men's hearts astray, bringing in their train unholy tyranny. For no man ever had the courage to reflect what reverses time might bring; but, disregarding law to gratify lawlessness, he shatters in gloom the car of happiness.

strophe 2

Deck thee with garlands, O Ismenus! break forth into dancing, ye paved streets of our seven-gated city! come Dirce, fount of

waters fair; and joined with her ye daughters of Asopus, come from your father's waves to add your maiden voices to our hymn, the victor's prize that Heracles hath won. O Pythian rock, with forests crowned, and haunts of the Muses on Helicon! make my city and her walls re-echo with cries of joy; where sprang the earth-born crop to view, a warrior-host with shields of brass, who are handing on their realm to children's children, a light divine to Thebes.

antistrophe 2

All hail the marriage! wherein two bridegrooms shared; the one, a mortal; the other, Zeus, who came to wed the maiden sprung from Perseus; for that marriage of thine, O Zeus, in days gone by has been proved to me a true story beyond all expectation; and time hath shown the lustre of Heracles' prowess, who emerged from caverns 'neath the earth after leaving Pluto's halls below. To me art thou a worthier lord than that base-born king, who now lets it be plainly seen in this struggle 'twixt armed warriors, whether justice still finds favour in heaven.

(*The spectres of* MADNESS *and* IRIS *appear from above. The* CHORUS *sees them.*)

Ha! see there, my old comrades! is the same wild panic fallen on us all; what phantom is this I see hovering o'er the house? Fly, fly, bestir thy tardy steps! begone! away! O saviour prince, avert calamity from me!

IRIS

Courage, old men! she, whom you see, is Madness, daughter of Night, and I am Iris, the handmaid of the gods. We have not come to do your city any hurt, but against the house of one man only is our warfare, even against him whom they call the son of Zeus and Alcmena. For until he had finished all his grievous toils, Destiny was preserving him, nor would father Zeus ever suffer me or Hera to harm him. But now that he hath accomplished the labours of Eurystheus, Hera is minded to brand him with the guilt of shedding kindred blood by slaying his own children, and I am one with her. Come then, maid unwed, child of murky Night, harden thy heart relentlessly, send forth frenzy upon him, confound his mind even to the slaying of his children, drive him, goad him wildly on his mad career, shake out the sails of death, that when he has sent o'er Acheron's ferry that fair group of children by his own murderous hand, he may learn to know how fiercely against him the wrath of Hera burns and may also experience mine; otherwise, if he escape punishment, the gods will become as naught, while man's power will grow.

MADNESS

Of noble parents was I born, the daughter of Night, sprung from the blood of Uranus; and these prerogatives I hold, not to use them in anger against friends, nor have I any joy in visiting the homes of men; and fain would I counsel Hera, before I see her err, and thee too, if ye will hearken to my words. This man, against whose house thou art sending me, has made himself a name alike in heaven and earth; for, after taming pathless wilds and raging sea, he by his single might raised up again the honours of the gods when sinking before man's impiety; wherefore I counsel thee, do not wish him dire mishaps.

IRIS

Spare us *thy* advice on Hera's and my schemes.

MADNESS

I seek to turn thy steps into the best path instead of into this one of evil.

IRIS

'Twas not to practice self-control that the wife of Zeus sent thee hither.

MADNESS

I call the sun-god to witness that herein I am acting against my will; but if indeed I must forthwith serve thee and Hera and follow you in full cry as hounds follow the huntsman, why go I will; nor shall ocean with its moaning waves, nor the earthquake, nor the thunderbolt with blast of agony be half so furious as the headlong rush I will make into the breast of Heracles; through his roof will I burst my way and swoop upon his house, after first slaying his children; nor shall their murderer know that he is killing his own-begotten babes, till he is released from my madness. Behold him! see how even now he is wildly tossing his head at the outset, and rolling his eyes fiercely from side to side without a word; nor can he control his panting breath; but like a bull in act to charge, he bellows fearfully, calling on the goddesses of nether hell. Soon will I rouse thee to yet wilder dancing and sound a note of terror in thine ear. Soar away, O Iris, to Olympus on thy honoured course; while I unseen will steal into the halls of Heracles.

(IRIS *and* MADNESS *vanish.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Alas! alas! lament, O city; the son of Zeus, thy fairest bloom, is being cut down.

Woe is thee, Hellas! that wilt cast from thee thy benefactor, and destroy him as he madly, wildly dances where no pipe is heard.

She is mounted on her car, the queen of sorrow and sighing, and

is goading on her steeds, as if for outrage, the Gorgon child of Night, with hundred hissing serpent-heads, Madness of the flashing eyes.

Soon hath the god changed his good fortune; soon will his children breathe their last, slain by a father's hand.

Ah me! alas! soon will vengeance, mad, relentless, lay low by a cruel death thy unhappy son, O Zeus, exacting a full penalty.

Alas, O house! the fiend begins her dance of death without the cymbal's crash, with no glad waving of the wine-god's staff.

Woe to these halls! toward bloodshed she moves, and not to pour libations of the juice of the grape.

O children, haste to fly; that is the chant of death her piping plays.

Ah, yes! he is chasing the children. Never, ah! never will Madness lead her revel rout in vain.

Ah misery!

Ah me! how I lament that aged sire, that mother too that bore his babes in vain.

Look! look!

A tempest rocks the house; the roof is falling with it.

Oh! what art thou doing, son of Zeus?

Thou art sending hell's confusion against thy house, as erst did Pallas on Enceladus.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters from the palace.*)

MESSENGER

Ye hoary men of eld!

CHORUS

Why, oh! why this loud address to me?

MESSENGER

Awful is the sight within!

CHORUS

No need for me to call another to announce that.

MESSENGER

Dead lie the children.

CHORUS

Alas!

MESSENGER

Ah weep! for here is cause for weeping.

CHORUS

A cruel murder, wrought by parents' hands!

MESSENGER

No words can utter more than we have suffered.

CHORUS

What, canst thou prove this piteous ruin was a father's outrage on his children? Tell me how these heaven-sent woes came rushing on the house; say how the children met their sad mischance.

MESSENGER

Victims to purify the house were stationed before the altar of Zeus, for Heracles had slain and cast from his halls the king of the land. There stood his group of lovely children, with his sire and Megara; and already the basket was being passed round the altar, and we were keeping holy silence. But just as Alcmena's son was bringing the torch in his right hand to dip it in the holy water, he stopped without a word. And as their father lingered, his children looked at him; and lo! he was changed; his eyes were rolling; he was distraught; his eyeballs were bloodshot and starting from their sockets, and foam was oozing down his bearded cheek. Anon he spoke, laughing the while a madman's laugh, "Father, why should I sacrifice before I have slain Eurystheus, why kindle the purifying flame and have the toil twice over, when I might at one stroke so fairly end it all? Soon as I have brought the head of Eurystheus hither, I will cleanse my hands for those already slain. Spill the water, cast the baskets from your hands. Ho! give me now my bow and club! To famed Mycenae will I go; crow-bars and pick-axes must I take, for I will heave from their very base with iron levers those city-walls which the Cyclopes squared with red plumb-line and mason's tools."

Then he set out, and though he had no chariot there, he thought he had, and was for mounting to its seat, and using a goad as though his fingers really held one. A twofold feeling filled his servants' breasts, half amusement, and half fear; and one looking to his neighbour said, "Is our master making sport for us, or is he mad?" But he the while was pacing to and fro in his house; and, rushing into the men's chamber, he thought he had reached the city of Nisus, albeit he had gone into his own halls. So he threw himself upon the floor, as if he were there, and made ready to feast. But after waiting a brief space he began saying he was on his way to the plains amid the valleys of the Isthmus; and then stripping himself of his mantle, he fell to competing with an imaginary rival, o'er whom he proclaimed himself victor with his own voice, calling on imaginary spectators to listen. Next, fancy carrying him to Mycenae, he was uttering fearful threats against Eurystheus. Meantime his father caught

him by his stalwart arm, and thus addressed him, "My son, what meanest thou hereby? What strange doings are these? Can it be that the blood of thy late victims has driven thee frantic?" But he, supposing it was the father of Eurystheus striving in abject supplication to touch his hand, thrust him aside, and then against his own children aimed his bow and made ready his quiver, thinking to slay the sons of Eurystheus. And they in wild affright darted hither and thither, one to his hapless mother's skirts, another to the shadow of a pillar, while a third cowered 'neath the altar like a bird. Then cried their mother, "O father, what art thou doing? dost mean to slay thy children?" Likewise his aged sire and all the gathered servants cried aloud. But he, hunting the child round and round the column, in dreadful circles, and coming face to face with him shot him to the heart; and he fell upon his back, sprinkling the stone pillars with blood as he gasped out his life. Then did Heracles shout for joy and boasted loud, "Here lies one of Eurystheus' brood dead at my feet, atoning for his father's hate." Against a second did he aim his bow, who had crouched at the altar's foot thinking to escape unseen. But ere he fired, the poor child threw himself at his father's knees, and, flinging his hand to reach his beard or neck, cried, "Oh! slay me not, dear father mine! I am thy child, thine own; 'tis no son of Eurystheus thou wilt slay."

But that other, with savage Gorgon-scowl, as the child now stood in range of his baleful archery, smote him on the head, as smites a smith his molten iron, bringing down his club upon the fair-haired boy, and crushed the bones. The second caught, away he hies to add a third victim to the other twain. But ere he could, the poor mother caught up her babe and carried him within the house and shut the doors; forthwith the madman, as though he really were at the Cyclopean walls, prizes open the doors with levers, and, hurling down their posts, with one fell shaft laid low his wife and child. Then in wild career he starts to slay his aged sire; but lo! there came a phantom,—so it seemed to us on-lookers,—of Pallas, with plumed helm, brandishing a spear; and she hurled a rock against the breast of Heracles, which stayed him from his frenzied thirst for blood and plunged him into sleep; to the ground he fell, smiting his back against a column that had fallen on the floor in twain when the roof fell in. Thereon we rallied from our flight, and with the old man's aid bound him fast with knotted cords to the pillar, that on his awakening he might do no further evil. So there he sleeps, poor wretch! a sleep that is not blest, having murdered wife and children; nay, for my part I know not any son of man more miserable than he.

(*The* MESSENGER *withdraws.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

That murder wrought by the daughters of Danaus, whereof my native Argos wots, was formerly the most famous and notorious in Hellas; but this hath surpassed and outdone those previous horrors. I could tell of the murder of that poor son of Zeus, whom Procne, mother of an only child, slew and offered to the Muses; [2] but thou hadst three children, wretched parent, and all of them hast thou in thy frenzy slain. What groans or wails, what funeral dirge, or chant of death am I to raise? Alas and woe! see, the bolted doors of the lofty palace are being rolled apart. Ah me! behold these children lying dead before their wretched father, who is sunk in awful slumber after shedding their blood. Round him are bonds and cords, made fast with many a knot about the body of Heracles, and lashed to the stone columns of his house. While he, the aged sire, like mother-bird wailing her unfledged brood, comes hasting hither with halting steps on his bitter journey.

(*The central doors of the palace have opened and have disclosed* HERACLES *lying asleep, bound to a shattered column.* AMPHITRYON *steps out. The following lines between* AMPHITRYON *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

AMPHITRYON

Softly, softly! ye aged sons of Thebes, let him sleep on and forget his sorrows.

CHORUS

For thee, old friend, I weep and mourn, for the children too and that victorious chief.

AMPHITRYON

Stand further off, make no noise nor outcry, rouse him not from his calm deep slumber.

CHORUS

O horrible! all this blood—

AMPHITRYON

Hush, hush! ye will be my ruin.

CHORUS

That he has spilt is rising up against him.

AMPHITRYON

Gently raise your dirge of woe, old friends; lest he wake, and, bursting his bonds, destroy the city, rend his sire, and dash his house to pieces.

CHORUS

I cannot, cannot—

AMPHITRYON

Hush! let me note his breathing; come, let me put my ear close.

CHORUS

Is he sleeping?

AMPHITRYON

Aye, that is he, a deathly sleep, having slain wife and children with the arrows of his twanging bow.

CHORUS

Ah! mourn—

AMPHITRYON

I do.

CHORUS

The children's death;

AMPHITRYON

Ah me!

CHORUS

And thy own son's doom.

AMPHITRYON

Ah misery!

CHORUS

Old friend—

AMPHITRYON

Hush! hush! he is turning, he is waking! Oh! let me hide myself beneath the covert of yon roof.

CHORUS

Courage! darkness still broods o'er thy son's eye.

AMPHITRYON

Oh! beware; 'tis not that I shrink from leaving the light after my miseries, poor wretch! but should he slay me that am his father, then will he be devising woe on woe, and to the avenging curse will add a parent's blood.

CHORUS

Well for thee hadst thou died in that day, when, to win they wife, thou didst go forth to exact vengeance for her slain brethren by sacking the Taphians' sea-beat town.

AMPHITRYON

Fly, fly, my aged friends, haste from before the palace, escape his waking fury! For soon will he heap up fresh carnage on the old, ranging wildly once more through the streets of Thebes.

CHORUS

O Zeus, why hast thou shown such savage hate against thine own son and plunged him in this sea of troubles?

HERACLES (*waking*)

Aha! my breath returns; I am alive; and my eyes see, opening on the sky and earth and yon sun's darting beam; but how my senses reel! in what strange turmoil am I plunged! my fevered breath in quick spasmodic gasps escapes my lungs. How now? why am I lying here, made fast with cables like a ship, my brawny chest and arms tied to a shattered piece of masonry, with corpses for my neighbours; while o'er the floor my bow and arrows are scattered, that erst like trusty squires to my arm both kept me safe and were kept safe of me? Surely I am not come a second time to Hades' halls, having just returned from thence for Eurystheus? No, I do not see Sisyphus with his stone, or Pluto, or his queen, Demeter's child. Surely I am distraught; I cannot remember where I am. Ho, there! which of my friends is near or far to help me in my ignorance? For I have no clear knowledge of things once familiar.

AMPHITRYON

My aged friends, shall I approach the scene of my sorrow?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yes, and let me go with thee, nor desert thee in thy trouble.

HERACLES

Father, why dost thou weep and veil thy eyes, standing aloof from thy beloved son?

AMPHITRYON

My child! mine still, for all thy misery.

HERACLES

Why, what is there so sad in my case that thou dost weep?

AMPHITRYON

That which might make any of the gods weep, were he to suffer so.

HERACLES

A bold assertion that, but thou art not yet explaining what has happened.

AMPHITRYON

Thine own eyes see that, if by this time thou are restored to thy senses.

HERACLES

Fill in thy sketch if any change awaits my life.

AMPHITRYON

I will explain, if thou art no longer mad as a fiend of hell.

HERACLES

God help us! what suspicions these dark hints of thine again excite!

AMPHITRYON

I am still doubtful whether thou art in thy sober senses.

HERACLES

I never remember being mad.

AMPHITRYON

Am I to loose my son, old friends, or what?

HERACLES

Loose and say who bound me; for I feel shame at this.

AMPHITRYON

Rest content with what thou knowest of thy woes; the rest forego.

HERACLES

Enough! I have no wish to probe thy silence.

AMPHITRYON

O Zeus, dost thou behold these deeds proceeding from the throne of Hera?

HERACLES

What! have I suffered something from her enmity?

AMPHITRYON

A truce to the goddess! attend to thy own troubles.

HERACLES

I am undone; what mischance wilt thou unfold?

AMPHITRYON

See here the corpses of thy children.

HERACLES

O horror! what hideous sight is here? ah me!

AMPHITRYON

My son, against thy children hast thou waged unnatural war.

HERACLES

War! what meanst thou? who killed these?

AMPHITRYON

Thou and thy bow and some god, whoso he be that is to blame.

HERACLES

What sayst thou? what have I done? Speak, father, thou messenger of evil.

AMPHITRYON

Thou wert distraught; 'tis a sad explanation thou art asking.

HERACLES

Was it I that slew my wife also?

AMPHITRYON

Thy own unaided arm hath done all this.

HERACLES

Ah, woe is me! a cloud of sorrow wraps me round.

AMPHITRYON

The reason this that I lament thy fate.

HERACLES

Did I dash my house to pieces or incite others thereto?

AMPHITRYON

Naught know I save this, that thou art utterly undone.

HERACLES

Where did my frenzy seize me? where did it destroy me?

AMPHITRYON

In the moment thou wert purifying thyself with fire at the altar.

HERACLES

Ah me! why do I spare my own life when I have taken that of my dear children? Shall I not hasten to leap from some sheer rock, or aim the sword against my heart and avenge my children's blood, or burn my body in the fire and so avert from my life the infamy which now awaits me?

But hither I see Theseus coming to check my deadly counsels, my kinsman and friend. Now shall I stand revealed, and the dearest of my friends will see the pollution I have incurred by my children's murder. Ah, woe is me! what am I to do? Where can I find release from my sorrows? shall I take wings or plunge beneath the earth? Come, let me veil my head in darkness; for I am ashamed of the evil I have done, and, since for these I have incurred fresh blood-guiltiness, I would fain not harm the innocent.

(THESEUS *and his retinue enter.*)

THESEUS

I am come, and others with me, young warriors from the land of Athens, encamped by the streams of Asopus, to help thy son, old friend. For a rumour reached the city of the Erechtheidae, that Lycus had usurped the sceptre of this land and was become your enemy even to battle. Wherefore I came making recompense for the former kindness of Heracles in saving me from the world below, if haply ye have any need of such aid as I or my allies can give, old prince.

Ha! what means this heap of dead upon the floor? Surely I have not delayed too long and come too late to check new ills? Who slew these children? whose wife is this I see? Boys do not go to battle; nay, it must be some other strange mischance I here discover.

(*The following lines between* THESEUS *and* AMPHITRYON *are chanted responsively.*)

AMPHITRYON

O king, whose home is that olive-clad hill!

THESEUS

Why this piteous prelude in addressing me?

AMPHITRYON

Heaven has afflicted us with grievous suffering.

THESEUS

Whose be these children, o'er whom thou weepest?

AMPHITRYON

My own son's children, woe to him! their father and butcher both was he, hardening his heart to the bloody deed.

THESEUS

Hush! good words only!

AMPHITRYON

I would I could obey!

THESEUS

What dreadful words!

AMPHITRYON

Fortune has spread her wings, and we are ruined, ruined.

THESEUS

What meanest thou? what hath he done?

AMPHITRYON

Slain them in a wild fit of frenzy with arrows dipped in the venom of the hundred-headed hydra.

THESEUS

This is Hera's work; but who lies there among the dead, old man?

AMPHITRYON

My son, my own enduring son, that marched with gods to Phlegra's plain, there to battle with giants and slay them, warrior that he was.

THESEUS

Ah, woe for him! whose fortune was e'er so curst as his?

AMPHITRYON

Never wilt thou find another that hath borne a larger share of suffering or been more fatally deceived.

THESEUS

Why doth he veil his head, poor wretch, in his robe?

AMPHITRYON

He is ashamed to meet thine eye; his kinsman's kind intent and his children's blood make him abashed.

THESEUS

But I come to sympathize; uncover him.

AMPHITRYON

My son, remove that mantle from thine eyes, throw it from thee, show thy face unto the sun; a counterpoise to weeping is battling for the mastery. In suppliant wise I entreat thee, as I grasp thy

beard, thy knees, thy hands, and let fall the tear from my old eyes. O my child! restrain thy savage lion-like temper, for thou art rushing forth on an unholy course of bloodshed, eager to join woe to woe.

THESEUS

Ho! To thee I call who art huddled there in thy misery, show to they friends thy face; for no darkness is black enough to hide thy sad mischance. Why dost thou wave thy hand at me, signifying murder? is it that I may not be polluted by speaking with thee? If I share thy misfortune, what is that to me? For if I too had luck in days gone by, I must refer it to the time when thou didst bring me safe from the dead to the light of life. I hate a friend whose gratitude grows old; one who is ready to enjoy his friends' prosperity but unwilling to sail in the same ship with them when their fortune lours. Arise, unveil thy head, poor wretch! and look on me. The gallant soul endures without a word such blows as heaven deals.

HERACLES

O Theseus, didst thou witness this struggle with my children?

THESEUS

I heard of it, and now I see the horrors thou meanest.

HERACLES

Why then hast thou unveiled my head to the sun?

THESEUS

Why have I? Thou, a man, canst not pollute what is of God.

HERACLES

Fly, luckless wretch, from my unholy taint.

THESEUS

The avenging fiend goes not forth from friend to friend.

HERACLES

For this I thank thee; I do not regret the service I did thee.

THESEUS

While I, for kindness then received, now show my pity for thee.

HERACLES

Ah yes! I am piteous, a murderer of my sons.

THESEUS

I weep for thee in thy changed fortunes.

HERACLES
Didst ever find another more afflicted?

THESEUS
Thy misfortunes reach from earth to heaven.

HERACLES
Therefore am I resolved on death.

THESEUS
Dost thou suppose the gods attend to these thy threats?

HERACLES
Remorseless hath heaven been to me; so I will prove the like to it.

THESEUS
Hush! lest thy presumption add to thy sufferings.

HERACLES
My barque is freighted full with sorrow; there is no room to stow aught further.

THESEUS
What wilt thou do? whither is thy fury drifting thee?

HERACLES
I will die and return to that world below whence I have just come.

THESEUS
Such language is fit for any common fellow.

HERACLES
Ah! thine is the advice of one outside sorrow's pale.

THESEUS
Are these indeed the words of Heracles, the much-enduring?

HERACLES
Though never so much as this. Endurance must have a limit.

THESEUS
Is this man's benefactor, his chiefest friend?

HERACLES
Man brings no help to me; no! Hera has her way.

THESEUS
Never will Hellas suffer thee to die through sheer perversity.

HERACLES

Hear me a moment, that I may enter the lists with words in answer to thy admonitions; and I will unfold to thee why life now as well as formerly has been unbearable to me. First I am the son of a man who incurred the guilt of blood, before he married my mother Alcmena, by slaying her aged sire. Now when the foundation is badly laid at birth, needs must the race be cursed with woe; and Zeus, whoever this Zeus may be, begot me as a butt for Hera's hate; yet be not thou vexed thereat, old man; for thee rather than Zeus do I regard as my father. Then whilst I was yet being suckled, that bride of Zeus did foist into my cradle fearsome snakes to compass my death. After I was grown to man's estate, of all the toils I then endured what need to tell? of all the lions, Typhons triple-bodied, and giants that I slew; or of the battle I won against the hosts of four-legged Centaurs? or how when I had killed the hydra, that monster with a ring of heads with power to grow again, I passed through countless other toils besides and came unto the dead to fetch to the light at the bidding of Eurystheus the three-headed hound, hell's porter. Last, ah, woe is me! have I perpetrated this bloody deed to crown the sorrows of my house with my children's murder. To this sore strait am I come; no longer may I dwell in Thebes, the city that I love; for suppose I stay, to what temple or gathering of friends shall I repair? For mine is no curse that invites address. Shall I to Argos? how can I, when I am an exile from my country? Well, is there a single other city I can fly to? And if there were, am I to be looked at askance as a marked man, branded by cruel stabbing tongues, "Is not this the son of Zeus that once murdered wife and children? Plague take him from the land!"

Now to one who was erst called happy, such changes are a grievous thing; though he who is always unfortunate feels no such pain, for sorrow is his birthright. This, methinks, is the piteous pass I shall one day come to; for earth will cry out forbidding me to touch her, the sea and the river-springs will refuse me a crossing, and I shall become like Ixion who revolves in chains upon that wheel. Wherefore this is best, that henceforth I be seen by none of the Hellenes, amongst whom in happier days I lived in bliss. What right have I to live? what profit can I have in the possession of a useless, impious life? So let that noble wife of Zeus break forth in dancing, beating with buskined foot on heaven's bright floor; for now hath she worked her heart's desire in utterly confounding the chiefest of Hellas' sons. Who would pray to such a goddess? Her jealousy of Zeus for his love of a woman hath destroyed the benefactors of Hellas, guiltless though they were.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This is the work of none other of the gods than the wife of Zeus; thou art right in that surmise.

THESEUS

I cannot counsel you to die [3] rather than to go on suffering. There is not a man alive that hath wholly 'scaped misfortune's taint, nor any god either, if what poets sing is true. Have they not intermarried in ways that law forbids? Have they not thrown fathers into ignominious chains to gain the sovereign power? Still they inhabit Olympus and brave the issue of their crimes. And yet what shalt thou say in thy defence, if thou, a child of man, dost kick against the pricks of fate, while they do not? Nay, then, leave Thebes in compliance with the law, and come with me to the city of Pallas. There, when I have purified thee of thy pollution, will I give thee temples and the half of all I have. Yea, I will give thee all those presents I received from the citizens for saving their children, seven sons and daughters seven, in the day I slew the bull of Crete; [4] for I have plots of land assigned me throughout the country; these shall henceforth be called after thee by men, whilst thou livest; and at thy death, when thou art gone to Hades' halls, the city of Athens shall unite in exalting thy honour with sacrifices and a monument of stone. For 'tis a noble crown for citizens to win from Hellas, even a reputation fair, by helping a man of worth. This is the return that I will make thee for saving me, for now art thou in need of friends. But when heaven delights to honour a man, he has no need of friends; for the god's aid, when he chooses to give it, is enough.

HERACLES

Alas! this is quite beside the question of my troubles. For my part, I do not believe that the gods indulge in unholy unions; and as for putting fetters on parents' hands, I have never thought that worthy of belief, nor will I now be so persuaded, nor again that one god is naturally lord and master of another. For the deity, if he be really such, has no wants; these are miserable fictions of the poets. But I, for all my piteous plight, reflected whether I should let myself be branded as a coward for giving up my life. For whoso schooleth not his frail mortal nature to bear fate's buffets as he ought, will never be able to withstand even a man's weapon. I will harden my heart against death and seek thy city, with grateful thanks for all thou offerest me.

(*He weeps.*)

Of countless troubles have I tasted, God knows, but never yet did I faint at any or shed a single tear; nay, nor ever dreamt that I should come to this, to let the tear-drop fall. But now, it seems, I must be fortune's slave. Well, let it pass; old father mine, thou seest me go forth to

exile, and in me beholdest my own children's murderer. Give them burial, and lay them out in death with the tribute of a tear, for the law forbids my doing so. Rest their heads upon their mother's bosom and fold them in her arms, sad pledges of our union, whom I, alas! unwittingly did slay. And when thou hast buried these dead, live on here still, in bitterness maybe, but still constrain thy soul to share my sorrows. O children! he who begat you, your own father, hath been your destroyer, and ye have had no profit of my triumphs, all my restless toil to win you a fair name in life, a glorious guerdon from a sire. Thee too, unhappy wife, this hand hath slain, a poor return to make thee for preserving mine honour so safe, for all the weary watch thou long hast kept within my house. Alas for you, my wife, my sons! and woe for me, how sad my lot, cut off from wife and child! Ah! these kisses, bitter-sweet! these weapons which 'tis pain to own! I am not sure whether to keep or let them go; dangling at my side they thus will say, "With us didst thou destroy children and wife; we are thy children's slayers, and thou keepest us." Shall I carry them after that? what answer can I make? Yet, am I to strip me of these weapons, the comrades of my glorious career in Hellas, and put myself thereby in the power of my foes, to die a death of shame? No! I must not let them go, but keep them, though it grieve me. In one thing, Theseus, help my misery; come to Argos with me and aid in settling my reward for bringing Cerberus thither; lest, if I go all alone, my sorrow for my sons do me some hurt.

O land of Cadmus, and all ye folk of Thebes! cut off your hair, and mourn with me; go to my children's burial, and with united dirge lament alike the dead and me; for on all of us hath Hera inflicted the same cruel blow of destruction.

THESEUS

Rise, unhappy man! thou hast had thy fill of tears.

HERACLES

I cannot rise; my limbs are rooted here.

THESEUS

Yea, even the strong are o'erthrown by misfortunes.

HERACLES

Ah! would I could grow into a stone upon this spot, oblivious of trouble!

THESEUS

Peace! give thy hand to a friend and helper.

HERACLES

Nay, let me not wipe off the blood upon thy robe.

THESEUS

Wipe it off and spare not; I will not say thee nay.

HERACLES

Reft of my own sons, I find thee as a son to me.

THESEUS

Throw thy arm about my neck; I will be thy guide.

HERACLES

A pair of friends in sooth are we, but one a man of sorrows. Ah! aged sire, this is the kind of man to make a friend.

AMPHITRYON

Blest in her sons, the country that gave him birth!

HERACLES

O Theseus, turn me back again to see my babes.

THESEUS

What charm dost think to find in this to soothe thy soul?

HERACLES

I long to do so, and would fain embrace my sire.

AMPHITRYON

Here am I, my son; thy wish is no less dear to me.

THESEUS

Hast thou so short a memory for thy troubles?

HERACLES

All that I endured of yore was easier to bear than this.

THESEUS

If men see thee play the woman, they will scoff.

HERACLES

Have I by living grown so abject in *thy* sight? 'twas not so once, methinks.

THESEUS

Aye, too much so; for how dost show thyself the glorious Heracles of yore?

HERACLES

What about thyself? what kind of hero wert thou when in trouble in the world below?

THESEUS

I was worse than anyone as far as courage went.

HERACLES

How then canst thou say of me, that I am abased by my troubles?

THESEUS

Forward!

HERACLES

Farewell, my aged sire!

AMPHITRYON

Farewell to thee, my son!

HERACLES

Bury my children as I said.

AMPHITRYON

But who will bury me, my son?

HERACLES

I will.

AMPHITRYON

When wilt thou come?

HERACLES

After thou hast buried my children.

AMPHITRYON

How?

HERACLES

I will fetch thee from Thebes to Athens. But carry my children within, a grievous burden to the earth. And I, after ruining my house by deeds of shame, will follow in the wake of Theseus, totally destroyed. Whoso prefers wealth or might to the possession of good friends, thinketh amiss.

(THESEUS *and his attendants lead* HERACLES *away.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

With grief and many a bitter tear we go our way, robbed of all we prized most dearly.

NOTE FOR HERACLES

COLERIDGE's translation has been slightly altered in the following lines: 63, 89, 138, 152, 204–205, 300, 362, 393, 421, 596, 627, 728, 732, 847, 917, 932, 1012, 1057, 1065, 1069, 1075, 1089, 1107, 1163, 1173, 1182, 1213, 1214, 1237, 1255, 1340, 1343, 1424.

1. The reference is to the Eleusinian mysteries. Privileges in Hades were guaranteed to initiates.

2. The allusion is to Itys, whose murder by his mother, as Coleridge points out, became a theme for poets, and hence was an offering to the Muses.

3. Some words seem to have been lost here. The beginning of the sentence has been supplied to establish the connection in thought. Cf. note *ad loc.* in the text of Paley.

4. *i.e.,* the Minotaur.

X

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Characters in the Play

Iphigenia, *daughter of Agamemnon*
Orestes, *brother of* Iphigenia
Pylades, *friend of* Orestes
Thoas, *King of the Taurians*
Herdsman
Messenger
Minerva
Chorus of Greek Women, *captives, attendants on* Iphigenia *in the temple*

INTRODUCTION

LACK of both external and internal evidence makes it impossible to date the *Iphigenia in Tauris,* though from its general tone approximately 420 B.C. seems a reasonable time for its composition. As is usual in a great many Euripidean plays, there is an element of aetiology present. Apparently a local religious festival in Attica, to which Euripides alludes in lines 1450 ff., attracted the poet's attention, and hence he connected his interpretation of the familiar legend of Iphigenia with certain features of contemporary religious ritual. Euripides, by using this device, perhaps may have given his play greater immediacy in the eyes of his Athenian audience, but he has not rendered the aetiological factor as relevant to the central nature of his piece, as Aeschylus has, for example, in *The Eumenides,* when he deals with the court of the Areopagus.

Some critics have felt that Euripides sought escape from the discouraging and disillusioning events of his times by composing what they would call "romantic" plays. In many ways this contention seems valid and it applies with particular cogency to the *Iphigenia in Tauris.* Here we meet a drama of excitement and adventure in which the protagonists extricate themselves successfully and triumphantly from a seemingly fatal situation. The prologue reveals that Euripides has adopted for his play the variant legend which recorded that Iphigenia had not actually been killed at Aulis. Her father, Agamemnon, in guilty obedience to the prophecy of Calchas, had brought her to Aulis to sacrifice her to Artemis (or Diana, as the translator of this play calls her) in order that the great expedition might sail for Troy. At the last moment Artemis substituted a hind for the maiden at the altar, and carried her far away to the land of the Taurians. Here under the orders of their king Thoas, she now serves as a priestess of the goddess, part of whose barbaric rite demands that all strangers who come to the land must be slain in religious sacrifice. The tense dramatic situation commences with the appearance of Iphigenia's brother, Orestes, and his friend Pylades, who are of course in the category of potential victims of the rite.

Euripides has presented two excellent characterizations in the play. Orestes is drawn as one whose former deeds have left upon him an in-

delible stain,—the "Furies" of his murdered mother still can shake his mental stability. He possesses great courage and, when in possession of himself, great clarity of mind, yet at the same time he leans heavily and somewhat pathetically upon his loyal friend, Pylades. Iphigenia likewise commands attention. She is still filled with bitterness because the Greeks would have sacrificed her at Aulis, but nevertheless she still loves Greece and longs desperately to return to her native land. She too possesses great courage, and manages coolly to carry out the plan whereby she may safely effect the flight of herself, her brother, and his friend. Some literal-minded interpreters have objected because she outwits Thoas by means of gross deception. The fact that the play in its central nature is melodramatically "romantic" tends to render such criticism irrelevant.

The drama on the whole is well constructed, even though Athena's appearance as a *deus ex machina* seems to be unsatisfactorily motivated. Aristotle thought well of at least one feature of the play, for he singled out the recognition scene between Iphigenia and Orestes to illustrate the best way in which this aspect of drama could be handled.[1] So far as the general significance of the play is concerned, there have been attempts to establish a definite religious orientation. This element seems only to be present in a secondary degree, for our attention cannot fail to be captured primarily by the desperate situation in which Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades find themselves and by the excitement of their escape.

[1] Aristotle, *Poetics,* chap. XVI.

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

(SCENE:—*Before the great temple of Diana of the Taurians. A blood-stained altar is prominently in view.* IPHIGENIA, *clad as a priestess, enters from the temple.*)

IPHIGENIA

To PISA, by the fleetest coursers borne,
Comes Pelops, son of Tantalus, and weds
The virgin daughter of Oenomaus:
From her sprung Atreus; Menelaus from him,
And Agamemnon; I from him derive
My birth, his Iphigenia, by his queen,
Daughter of Tyndarus. Where frequent winds
Swell the vex'd Euripus with eddying blasts,
And roll the darkening waves, my father slew me,
A victim to Diana, so he thought,
For Helen's sake, its bay where Aulis winds,
To fame well known; for there his thousand ships,
The armament of Greece, the imperial chief
Convened, desirous that his Greeks should snatch
The glorious crown of victory from Troy,
And punish the base insult to the bed
Of Helen, vengeance grateful to the soul
Of Menelaus. But 'gainst his ships the sea
Long barr'd, and not one favouring breeze to swell
His flagging sails, the hallow'd flames the chief
Consults, and Calchas thus disclosed the fates:—
"Imperial leader of the Grecian host,
Hence shalt thou not unmoor thy vessels, ere
Diana as a victim shall receive
Thy daughter Iphigenia: what the year
Most beauteous should produce, thou to the queen
Dispensing light didst vow to sacrifice:
A daughter Clytemnestra in thy house

Then bore (the peerless grace of beauty thus
To me assigning); her must thou devote
The victim." Then Ulysses by his arts,
Me, to Achilles as design'd a bride,
Won from my mother. My unhappy fate
To Aulis brought me; on the altar there
High was I placed, and o'er me gleam'd the sword,
Aiming the fatal wound: but from the stroke
Diana snatch'd me, in exchange a hind
Giving the Grecians; through the lucid air
Me she conveyed to Tauris, here to dwell,
Where o'er barbarians a barbaric king
Holds his rude sway, named Thoas, whose swift foot
Equals the rapid wing: me he appoints
The priestess of this temple, where such rites
Are pleasing to Diana, that the name
Alone claims honour; for I sacrifice
(Such, ere I came, the custom of the state)
Whatever Grecian to this savage shore
Is driven: the previous rites are mine; the deed
Of blood, too horrid to be told, devolves
On others in the temple: but the rest,
In reverence to the goddess, I forbear.
But the strange visions which the night now past
Brought with it, to the air, if that may soothe
My troubled thought, I will relate. I seem'd,
As I lay sleeping, from this land removed,
To dwell at Argos, resting on my couch
Mid the apartments of the virgin train.
Sudden the firm earth shook: I fled, and stood
Without; the battlements I saw, and all
The rocking roof fall from its lofty height
In ruins to the ground: of all the house,
My father's house, one pillar, as I thought,
Alone was left, which from its cornice waved
A length of auburn locks, and human voice
Assumed: the bloody office, which is mine
To strangers here, respecting, I to death,
Sprinkling the lustral drops, devoted it
With many tears. My dream I thus expound:—
Orestes, whom I hallow'd by my rites,
Is dead: for sons are pillars of the house;
They, whom my lustral lavers sprinkle, die.

I cannot to my friends apply my dream,
For Strophius, when I perish'd, had no son.
Now, to my brother, absent though he be,
Libations will I offer: this, at least,
With the attendants given me by the king,
Virgins of Greece, I can: but what the cause
They yet attend me not within the house,
The temple of the goddess, where I dwell?
(*She goes into the temple.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter cautiously.*)

ORESTES

Keep careful watch, lest some one come this way.

PYLADES

I watch, and turn mine eye to every part.

ORESTES

And dost thou, Pylades, imagine this
The temple of the goddess, which we seek,
Our sails from Argos sweeping o'er the main?

PYLADES

Orestes, such my thought, and must be thine.

ORESTES

And this the altar wet with Grecian blood?

PYLADES

Crimson'd with gore behold its sculptured wreaths.

ORESTES

See, from the battlements what trophies hang!

PYLADES

The spoils of strangers that have here been slain.

ORESTES

Behooves us then to watch with careful eye.
O Phoebus, by thy oracles again
Why hast thou led me to these toils? E'er since,
In vengeance for my father's blood, I slew
My mother, ceaseless by the Furies driven,
Vagrant, an outcast, many a bending course
My feet have trod: to thee I came, of thee
Inquired this whirling frenzy by what means,

And by what means my labours I might end.
Thy voice commanded me to speed my course
To this wild coast of Tauris, where a shrine
Thy sister hath, Diana; thence to take
The statue of the goddess, which from heaven
(So say the natives) to this temple fell:
This image, or by fraud or fortune won,
The dangerous toil achieved, to place the prize
In the Athenian land: no more was said;
But that, performing this, I should obtain
Rest from my toils. Obedient to thy words,
On this unknown, inhospitable coast
Am I arrived. Now, Pylades (for thou
Art my associate in this dangerous task),
Of thee I ask, What shall we do? for high
The walls, thou seest, which fence the temple round.
Shall we ascend their height? But how escape
Observing eyes? Or burst the brazen bars?
Of these we nothing know: in the attempt
To force the gates, or meditating means
To enter, if detected, we shall die.
Shall we then, ere we die, by flight regain
The ship in which we hither plough'd the sea?

PYLADES

Of flight we brook no thought, nor such hath been
Our wont; nor may the god's commanding voice
Be disobey'd; but from the temple now
Retiring, in some cave, which the black sea
Beats with its billows, we may lie conceal'd
At distance from our bark, lest some, whose eyes
May note it, bear the tidings to the king,
And we be seized by force. But when the eye
Of night comes darkling on, then must we dare,
And take the polish'd image from the shrine,
Attempting all things: and the vacant space
Between the triglyphs (mark it well) enough
Is open to admit us; by that way
Attempt we to descend: in toils the brave
Are daring; of no worth the abject soul.

ORESTES

This length of sea we plough'd not, from this coast,
Nothing effected, to return: but well

Hast thou advised; the god must be obey'd.
Retire we then where we may lie conceal'd;
For never from the god will come the cause,
That what his sacred voice commands should fall
Effectless. We must dare. No toil to youth
Excuse, which justifies inaction, brings.

(*They go out.* IPHIGENIA *and the* CHORUS *enter from the temple.*)

IPHIGENIA (*singing*)[1]

You, who your savage dwellings hold
Nigh this inhospitable main,
'Gainst clashing rocks with fury roll'd,
From all but hallow'd words abstain.
Virgin queen, Latona's grace,
Joying in the mountain chase,
To thy court, thy rich domain,
To thy beauteous-pillar'd fane
Where our wondering eyes behold
Battlements that blaze with gold,
Thus my virgin steps I bend,
Holy, the holy to attend;
Servant, virgin queen, to thee;
Power, who bear'st life's golden key,
Far from Greece for steeds renown'd,
From her walls with towers crown'd,
From the beauteous-planted meads
Where his train Eurotas leads,
Visiting the loved retreats,
Once my father's royal seats.

CHORUS (*singing*)

I come. What cares disturb thy rest?
Why hast thou brought me to the shrine?
Doth some fresh grief afflict thy breast?
Why bring me to this seat divine?
Thou daughter of that chief, whose powers
Plough'd with a thousand keels the strand,
And ranged in arms shook Troy's proud towers
Beneath the Atreidae's great command!

IPHIGENIA (*singing*)

O ye attendant train,
How is my heart oppress'd with wo!
What notes, save notes of grief, can flow,
A harsh and unmelodious strain?
My soul domestic ills oppress with dread,
And bid me mourn a brother dead.
What visions did my sleeping sense appal
In the past dark and midnight hour!
'Tis ruin, ruin all.
My father's house,—it is no more:
No more is his illustrious line.
What dreadful deeds hath Argos known!
One only brother, Fate, was mine;
And dost thou rend him from me? Is he gone
To Pluto's dreary realms below?
For him, as dead, with pious care
This goblet I prepare;
And on the bosom of the earth shall flow
Streams from the heifer mountain-bred,
The grape's rich juice, and, mix'd with these,
The labour of the yellow bees,
Libations soothing to the dead.
Give me the oblation: let me hold
The foaming goblet's hallow'd gold.

O thou, the earth beneath,
Who didst from Agamemnon spring;
To thee, deprived of vital breath,
I these libations bring.
Accept them: to thy honour'd tomb,
Never, ah! never shall I come;
Never these golden tresses bear,
To place them there, there shed the tear;
For from my country far, a hind
There deem'd as slain, my wild abode I find.

CHORUS (*singing*)

To thee thy faithful train
The Asiatic hymn will raise,
A doleful, a barbaric strain,
Responsive to thy lays,
And steep in tears the mournful song,—

Notes, which to the dead belong;
Dismal notes, attuned to woe
By Pluto in the realms below:
No sprightly air shall we employ
To cheer the soul, and wake the sense of joy.

IPHIGENIA (*singing*)

The Atreidae are no more;
Extinct their sceptre's golden light;
My father's house from its proud height
Is fallen: its ruins I deplore.
Who of her kings at Argos holds his reign,
Her kings once bless'd? But Sorrow's train
Rolls on impetuous for the rapid steeds
Which o'er the strand with Pelops fly.
From what atrocious deeds
Starts the sun back, his sacred eye
Of brightness, loathing, turn'd aside?
And fatal to their house arose,
From the rich ram, Thessalia's golden pride,
Slaughter on slaughter, woes on woes:
Thence, from the dead ages past,
Vengeance came rushing on its prey,
And swept the race of Tantalus away.
Fatal to thee its ruthless haste;
To me too fatal, from the hour
My mother wedded, from the night
She gave me to life's opening light,
Nursed by affliction's cruel power.
Early to me, the Fates unkind,
To know what sorrow is assign'd:
Me Leda's daughter, hapless dame,
First blooming offspring of her bed
(A father's conduct here I blame),
A joyless victim bred;
When o'er the strand of Aulis, in the pride
Of beauty kindling flames of love,
High on my splendid car I move,
Betrothed to Thetis' son a bride:
Ah, hapless bride, to all the train
Of Grecian fair preferr'd in vain!
But now, a stranger on this strand,
'Gainst which the wild waves beat,

I hold my dreary, joyless seat,
Far distant from my native land,
Nor nuptial bed is mine, nor child, nor friend.
At Argos now no more I raise
The festal song in Juno's praise;
Nor o'er the loom sweet-sounding bend,
As the creative shuttle flies;
Give forms of Titans fierce to rise;
And, dreadful with her purple spear,
Image Athenian Pallas there:
But on this barbarous shore
The unhappy stranger's fate I moan,
The ruthless altar stain'd with gore,
His deep and dying groan;
And, for each tear that weeps his woes,
From me a tear of pity flows.
Of these the sad remembrance now must sleep:
A brother dead, ah me! I weep:
At Argos him, by fate oppress'd,
I left an infant at the breast,
A beauteous bud, whose opening charms
Then blossom'd in his mother's arms;
Orestes, born to high command,
The imperial sceptre of the Argive land.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Leaving the sea-wash'd shore a herdsman comes
Speeding, with some fresh tidings to thee fraught.
(*A* HERDSMAN *enters.*)

HERDSMAN

Daughter of Agamemnon, and bright gem
Of Clytemnestra, hear strange things from me.

IPHIGENIA

And what of terror doth thy tale import?

HERDSMAN

Two youths, swift-rowing 'twixt the clashing rocks
Of our wild sea, are landed on the beach,
A grateful offering at Diana's shrine,
And victims to the goddess. Haste, prepare
The sacred lavers, and the previous rites.

IPHIGENIA
Whence are the strangers? from what country named?

HERDSMAN
From Greece: this only, nothing more, I know.

IPHIGENIA
Didst thou not hear what names the strangers bear?

HERDSMAN
One by the other was call'd Pylades.

IPHIGENIA
How is the stranger, his companion, named?

HERDSMAN
This none of us can tell: we heard it not.

IPHIGENIA
How saw you them? how seized them? by what chance?

HERDSMAN
Mid the rude cliffs that o'er the Euxine hang—

IPHIGENIA
And what concern have herdsmen with the sea?

HERDSMAN
To wash our herds in the salt wave we came.

IPHIGENIA
To what I ask'd return: how seized you them?
Tell me the manner; this I wish to know:
For slow the victims come, nor hath some while
The altar of the goddess, as was wont,
Been crimson'd with the streams of Grecian blood.

HERDSMAN
Our herds, which in the forest feed, we drove
Amid the tide that rushes to the shore,
'Twixt the Symplegades: it was the place,
Where in the rifted rock the chafing surge
Hath hallow'd a rude cave, the haunt of those
Whose quest is purple. Of our number there
A herdsman saw two youths, and back return'd
With soft and silent step; then pointing, said,
"Do you not see them? These are deities

That sit there." One, who with religious awe
Revered the gods, with hands uplifted pray'd,
His eyes fix'd on them,—"Son of the sea-nymph
Leucothoe, guardian of the labouring bark,
Our lord Palaemon, be propitious to us!
Or sit you on our shores, bright sons of Jove,
Castor and Pollux? Or the glorious boast
Of Nereus, father of the noble choir
Of fifty Nereids?" One, whose untaught mind
Audacious folly harden'd 'gainst the sense
Of holy awe, scoff'd at his prayers, and said,—
"These are wreck'd mariners, that take their seat
In the cleft rock through fear, as they have heard
Our prescribed rite, that here we sacrifice
The stranger." To the greater part he seem'd
Well to have spoken, and we judged it meet
To seize the victims, by our country's law
Due to the goddess. Of the stranger youths,
One at this instant started from the rock:
Awhile he stood, and wildly toss'd his head,
And groan'd, his loose arms trembling all their length,
Convulsed with madness; and a hunter loud
Then cried,—"Dost thou behold her, Pylades?
Dost thou not see this dragon fierce from hell
Rushing to kill me, and against me rousing
Her horrid vipers? See this other here,
Emitting fire and slaughter from her vests,
Sails on her wings, my mother in her arms
Bearing, to hurl this mass of rock upon me!
Ah, she will kill me! Whither shall I fly?"
His visage might we see no more the same,
And his voice varied; now the roar of bulls,
The howl of dogs now uttering, mimic sounds
Sent by the maddening Furies, as they say.
Together thronging, as of death assured,
We sit in silence; but he drew his sword,
And, like a lion rushing mid our herds,
Plunged in their sides the weapon, weening thus
To drive the Furies, till the briny wave
Foam'd with their blood. But when among our herds
We saw this havoc made, we all 'gan rouse
To arms, and blew our sounding shells to alarm
The neighbouring peasants; for we thought in fight

Rude herdsmen to these youthful strangers, train'd
To arms, ill match'd; and forthwith to our aid
Flock'd numbers. But, his frenzy of its force
Abating, on the earth the stranger falls,
Foam bursting from his mouth: but when he saw
The advantage, each adventured on and hurl'd
What might annoy him fallen: the other youth
Wiped off the foam, took of his person care,
His fine-wrought robe spread over him; with heed
The flying stones observing, warded off
The wounds, and each kind office to his friend
Attentively perform'd. His sense return'd;
The stranger started up, and soon perceived
The tide of foes that roll'd impetuous on,
The danger and distress that closed them round.
He heaved a sigh; an unremitting storm
Of stones we pour'd, and each incited each:
Then we his dreadful exhortation heard:—
"Pylades, we shall die; but let us die
With glory: draw thy sword, and follow me."
But when we saw the enemies advance
With brandish'd swords, the steep heights crown'd with wood
We fell in flight: but others, if one flies,
Press on them; if again they drive these back,
What before fled turns, with a storm of stones
Assaulting them; but, what exceeds belief,
Hurl'd by a thousand hands, not one could hit
The victims of the goddess: scarce at length,
Not by brave daring seized we them, but round
We closed upon them, and their swords with stones
Beat, wily, from their hands; for on their knees
They through fatigue had sunk upon the ground:
We bare them to the monarch of this land:
He view'd them, and without delay to thee
Sent them devoted to the cleansing vase,
And to the altar. Victims such as these,
O virgin, wish to find; for if such youths
Thou offer, for thy slaughter Greece will pay,
Her wrongs to thee at Aulis well avenged.

LEADER

These things are wonderful, which thou hast told
Of him, whoe'er he be, the youth from Greece
Arrived on this inhospitable shore.

IPHIGENIA

'Tis well: go thou, and bring the strangers hither:
What here is to be done shall be our care.
(*The* HERDSMAN *departs.*)
O my unhappy heart! before this hour
To strangers thou wast gentle, always touch'd
With pity, and with tears their tears repaid,
When Grecians, natives of my country, came
Into my hands: but from the dreams, which prompt
To deeds ungentle, showing that no more
Orestes views the sun's fair light, whoe'er
Ye are that hither come, me will you find
Relentless now. This is the truth, my friends:
My heart is rent; and never will the wretch,
Who feels affliction's cruel tortures, bear
Good-will to those that are more fortunate.
Never came gale from Jove, nor flying bark,
Which 'twixt the dangerous rocks of the Euxine sea
Brought Helen hither, who my ruin wrought,
Nor Menelaus; that on them my foul wrongs
I might repay, and with an Aulis here
Requite the Aulis there, where I was seized,
And, as a heifer, by the Grecians slain:
My father too, who gave me birth, was priest.
Ah me! the sad remembrance of those ills
Yet lives: how often did I stroke thy cheek,
And, hanging on thy knees, address thee thus:—
"Alas, my father! I by thee am led
A bride to bridal rites unbless'd and base:
Them, while by thee I bleed, my mother hymns,
And the Argive dames, with hymeneal strains,
And with the jocund pipe the house resounds:
But at the altar I by thee am slain;
For Pluto was the Achilles, not the son
Of Peleus, whom to me thou didst announce
The affianced bridegroom, and by guile didst bring
To bloody nuptials in the rolling car."
But, o'er mine eyes the veil's fine texture spread,
This brother in my hands who now is lost,
I clasp'd not, though his sister; did not press
My lips to his, through virgin modesty,
As going to the house of Peleus: then
Each fond embrace I to another time

Deferr'd, as soon to Argos to return.
If, O unhappy brother, thou art dead,
From what a state, thy father's envied height
Of glory, loved Orestes, art thou torn!—
These false rules of the goddess much I blame: [2]
Whoe'er of mortals is with slaughter stain'd,
Or hath at childbirth given assisting hands,
Or chanced to touch aught dead, she as impure
Drives from her altars; yet herself delights
In human victims bleeding at her shrine.
Ne'er did Latona from the embrace of Jove
Bring forth such inconsistence: I then deem
The feast of Tantalus, where gods were guests,
Unworthy of belief, as that they fed
On his son's flesh delighted; and I think
These people, who themselves have a wild joy
In shedding human blood, their savage guilt
Charge on the goddess: for this truth I hold;
None of the gods is evil, or doth wrong.

(*She enters the temple.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Ye rocks, ye clashing rocks, whose brow
Frowns o'er the darken'd deeps below;
Whose wild, inhospitable wave,
From Argos flying and her native spring,
The virgin once was known to brave,
Tormented with the brize's maddening sting,
From Europe when the rude sea o'er
She pass'd to Asia's adverse shore;
Who are these hapless youths, that dare to land,
Leaving those soft, irriguous meads,
Where, his green margin fringed with reeds,
Eurotas rolls his ample tide,
Or Dirce's hallow'd waters glide,
And touch this barbarous, stranger-hating strand,
The altars where a virgin dews,
And blood the pillar'd shrine imbrues?

antistrophe 1

Did they with oars impetuous sweep
(Rank answering rank) the foamy deep,
And wing their bark with flying sails,

To raise their humble fortune their desire;
Eager to catch the rising gales,
Their bosoms with the love of gain on fire?
For sweet is hope to man's fond breast;
The hope of gain, insatiate guest,
Though on her oft attends Misfortune's train;
For daring man she tempts to brave
The dangers of the boisterous wave,
And leads him heedless of his fate
Through many a distant barbarous state.
Vain his opinions, his pursuits are vain!
Boundless o'er some her power is shown,
But some her temperate influence own.

strophe 2

How did they pass the dangerous rocks
Clashing with rude, tremendous shocks?
How pass the savage-howling shore,
Where once the unhappy Phineus held his reign,
And sleep affrighted flies its roar,
Steering their rough course o'er this boisterous main,
Form'd in a ring, beneath whose waves
The Nereid train in high arch'd caves
Weave the light dance, and raise the sprightly song,
While, whispering in their swelling sails,
Soft Zephyrs breathe, or southern gales
Piping amid their tackling play,
As their bark ploughs its watery way
Those hoary cliffs, the haunts of birds, along,
To that wild strand, the rapid race
Where once Achilles deign'd to grace?

antistrophe 2

O that from Troy some chance would bear
Leda's loved daughter, fatal fair!
(The royal virgin's vows are mine)
That her bright tresses roll'd in crimson dew,
Her warm blood flowing at this shrine
The altar of the goddess might imbrue;
And Vengeance, righteous to repay
Her former mischiefs, seize her prey!
But with what rapture should I hear his voice,
If one this shore should reach from Greece,
And bid the toils of slavery cease!

Or might I in the hour of rest
With pleasing dreams of Greece be bless'd;
So in my house, my native land rejoice;
In sleep enjoy the pleasing strain
For happiness restored again!

(IPHIGENIA *enters from the temple.*)

IPHIGENIA

But the two youths, their hands fast bound in chains,
The late-seized victims to the goddess, come.
Silence, my friends; for, destined at the shrine
To bleed, the Grecian strangers near approach;
And no false tidings did the herdsman bring.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Goddess revered, if grateful to thy soul
This state presents such sacrifice, accept
The victims, which the custom of this land
Gives thee, but deem'd unholy by the Greeks.

(*Guards lead in* ORESTES *and* PYLADES, *bound.*)

IPHIGENIA

No more; that to the goddess each due rite
Be well perform'd shall be my care. Unchain
The strangers' hands; that, hallow'd as they are,
They may no more be bound.

(*The guards release* ORESTES *and* PYLADES.)

Go you, prepare
Within the temple what the rites require.
Unhappy youths, what mother brought you forth,
Your father who? Your sister, if perchance
Ye have a sister, of what youths deprived?
For brother she shall have no more. Who knows
Whom such misfortunes may attend? For dark
What the gods will creeps on; and none can tell
The ills to come: this fortune from the sight
Obscures. But, O unhappy strangers, say,
Whence came you? Sail'd you long since for this land?
But long will be your absence from your homes,
For ever, in the dreary realms below.

ORESTES

Lady, whoe'er thou art, why for these things
Dost thou lament? why mourn for ills, which soon

Will fall on us? Him I esteem unwise,
Who, when he sees death near, tries to o'ercome
Its terrors with bewailings, without hope
Of safety: ill he adds to ill, and makes
His folly known, yet dies. We must give way
To fortune; therefore mourn not thou for us:
We know, we are acquainted with your rites.

IPHIGENIA
Which of you by the name of Pylades
Is call'd? This first it is my wish to know.

ORESTES
If aught of pleasure that may give thee, he.

IPHIGENIA
A native of what Grecian state, declare.

ORESTES
What profit knowing this wouldst thou obtain?

IPHIGENIA
And are you brothers, of one mother born?

ORESTES
Brothers by friendship, lady, not by birth.

IPHIGENIA
To thee what name was by thy father given?

ORESTES
With just cause I Unhappy might be call'd.

IPHIGENIA
I ask not that; to fortune that ascribe.

ORESTES
Dying unknown, rude scoffs I shall avoid.

IPHIGENIA
Wilt thou refuse? Why are thy thoughts so high?

ORESTES
My body thou mayst kill, but not my name.

IPHIGENIA
Wilt thou not say a native of what state?

ORESTES
The question naught avails, since I must die.

IPHIGENIA
What hinders thee from granting me this grace?

ORESTES
The illustrious Argos I my country boast.

IPHIGENIA
By the gods, stranger, is thy birth from thence?

ORESTES
My birth is from Mycenae, once the bless'd.

IPHIGENIA
Dost thou an exile fly, or by what fate?

ORESTES
Of my free will, in part not free, I fly.

IPHIGENIA
Wilt thou then tell me what I wish to know?

ORESTES
Whate'er is foreign to my private griefs.

IPHIGENIA
To my dear wish from Argos art thou come.

ORESTES
Not to my wish; but if to thine, enjoy it.

IPHIGENIA
Troy, whose fame spreads so wide, perchance thou know'st.

ORESTES
O that I ne'er had known her, ev'n in dreams!

IPHIGENIA
They say she is no more, by war destroy'd.

ORESTES
It is so: you have heard no false reports.

IPHIGENIA
Is Helena with Menelaus return'd?

ORESTES
She is; and one I love her coming rues.

IPHIGENIA
Where is she? Me too she of old hath wrong'd.

ORESTES
At Sparta with her former lord she dwells.

IPHIGENIA
By Greece, and not by me alone abhorr'd!

ORESTES
I from her nuptials have my share of grief.

IPHIGENIA
And are the Greeks, as Fame reports, return'd?

ORESTES
How briefly all things dost thou ask at once!

IPHIGENIA
This favour, ere thou die, I wish to obtain.

ORESTES
Ask, then: since such thy wish, I will inform thee.

IPHIGENIA
Calchas, a prophet,—came he back from Troy?

ORESTES
He perish'd: at Mycenae such the fame.

IPHIGENIA
Goddess revered! But doth Ulysses live?

ORESTES
He lives, they say, but is not yet return'd.

IPHIGENIA
Perish the wretch, nor see his country more!

ORESTES
Wish him not ill, for all with him is ill.

IPHIGENIA
But doth the son of sea-born Thetis live?

ORESTES
He lives not: vain his nuptial rites at Aulis.

IPHIGENIA
That all was fraud, as those who felt it say.

ORESTES
But who art thou, inquiring thus of Greece?

IPHIGENIA
I am from thence, in early youth undone.

ORESTES
Thou hast a right to inquire what there hath pass'd.

IPHIGENIA
What know'st thou of the chief, men call the bless'd?

ORESTES
Who? Of the bless'd was not the chief I knew.

IPHIGENIA
The royal Agamemnon, son of Atreus.

ORESTES
Of him I know not, lady; cease to ask.

IPHIGENIA
Nay, by the gods, tell me, and cheer my soul.

ORESTES
He's dead, the unhappy chief: no single ill.

IPHIGENIA
Dead! By what adverse fate? O wretched me!

ORESTES
Why mourn for this? How doth it touch thy breast?

IPHIGENIA
The glories of his former state I mourn.

ORESTES
Dreadfully murdered by a woman's hand.

IPHIGENIA
How wretched she that slew him, he thus slain!

ORESTES
Now then forbear: of him inquire no more.

IPHIGENIA
This only: lives the unhappy monarch's wife?

ORESTES
She, lady, is no more, slain by her son.

IPHIGENIA
Alas, the ruin'd house! What his intent?

ORESTES
To avenge on her his noble father slain.

IPHIGENIA
An ill, but righteous deed, how justly done!

ORESTES
Though righteous, by the gods he is not bless'd.

IPHIGENIA
Hath Agamemnon other offspring left?

ORESTES
He left one virgin daughter, named Electra.

IPHIGENIA
Of her that died a victim is aught said?

ORESTES
This only, dead, she sees the light no more.

IPHIGENIA
Unhappy she! the father too who slew her!

ORESTES
For a bad woman she unseemly died.

IPHIGENIA
At Argos lives the murdered father's son?

ORESTES
Nowhere he lives, poor wretch! and everywhere.

IPHIGENIA
False dreams, farewell; for nothing you import.

ORESTES

Nor are those gods, that have the name of wise,
Less false than fleeting dreams. In things divine,
And in things human, great confusion reigns.
One thing is left; that, not unwise of soul,
Obedient to the prophet's voice he perish'd;
For that he perish'd, they who know report.

LEADER

What shall we know, what of our parents know?
If yet they live or not, who can inform us?

IPHIGENIA

Hear me: this converse prompts a thought, which gives
Promise of good, ye youths of Greece, to you,
To these, and me: thus may it well be done,
If, willing to my purpose, all assent.
Wilt thou, if I shall save thee, go for me
A messenger to Argos, to my friends
Charged with a letter, which a captive wrote,
Who pitied me, nor murderous thought my hand,
But that he died beneath the law, these rites
The goddess deeming just? for from that hour
I have not found who might to Argos bear
Himself my message, back with life return'd,
Or send to any of my friends my letter.
Thou, therefore, since it seems thou dost not bear
Ill-will to me, and dost Mycenae know,
And those I wish to address, be safe, and live,
No base reward for a light letter, life
Receiving; and let him, since thus the state
Requires, without thee to the goddess bleed.

ORESTES

Virgin unknown, well hast thou said in all
Save this, that to the goddess he should bleed
A victim; that were heavy grief indeed.
I steer'd the vessel to these ills; he sail'd
Attendant on my toils: to gain thy grace
By his destruction, and withdraw myself
From sufferings, were unjust: thus let it be:
Give him the letter; to fulfil thy wish,
To Argos he will bear it: me let him
Who claims that office, slay: base is his soul,

Who in calamities involves his friends,
And saves himself; this is a friend, whose life,
Dear to me as my own, I would preserve.

IPHIGENIA

Excellent spirit! from some noble root
It shows thee sprung, and to thy friends a friend
Sincere; of those that share my blood if one
Remains, such may he be! for I am not
Without a brother, strangers, from my sight
Though distant now. Since then thy wish is such,
Him will I send to Argos; he shall bear
My letter; thou shalt die; for this desire
Hath strong possession of thy noble soul.

ORESTES

Who then shall do the dreadful deed, and slay me?

IPHIGENIA

I: to atone the goddess is my charge.

ORESTES

A charge unenvied, virgin, and unbless'd.

IPHIGENIA

Necessity constrains: I must obey.

ORESTES

Wilt thou, a woman, plunge the sword in men?

IPHIGENIA

No: but thy locks to sprinkle round is mine.

ORESTES

Whose then, if I may ask, the bloody deed?

IPHIGENIA

To some within the temple this belongs.

ORESTES

What tomb is destined to receive my corse?

IPHIGENIA

The hallow'd fire within, and a dark cave.

ORESTES

O, that a sister's hand might wrap these limbs!

IPHIGENIA

Vain wish, unhappy youth, whoe'er thou art,
Hast thou conceived; for from this barbarous land
Far is her dwelling. Yet, of what my power
Permits (since thou from Argos draw'st thy birth),
No grace will I omit: for in the tomb
I will place much of ornament, and pour
The dulcet labour of the yellow bee,
From mountain flowers extracted, on thy pyre.
But I will go, and from the temple bring
The letter; yet 'gainst me no hostile thought
Conceive. You, that attend here, guard them well,
But without chains. To one, whom most I love
Of all my friends, to Argos I shall send
Tidings perchance unlook'd for; and this letter,
Declaring those whom he thought dead alive,
Shall bear him an assured and solid joy.

(*She enters the temple.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Thee, o'er whose limbs the bloody drops shall soon
Be from the lavers sprinkled, I lament.

ORESTES

This asks no pity, strangers: but farewell.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Thee for thy happy fate we reverence, youth
Who to thy country shall again return.

PYLADES

To friends unwish'd, who leave their friends to die.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Painful dismission! Which shall I esteem
Most lost, alas, alas! which most undone?
For doubts my wavering judgment yet divide,
If chief for thee my sighs should swell, or thee.

ORESTES

By the gods, Pylades, is thy mind touch'd
In manner like as mine?

PYLADES

I cannot tell;
Nor to thy question have I to reply.

ORESTES

Who is this virgin? With what zeal for Greece
Made she inquiries of us what the toils
At Troy, if yet the Grecians were return'd,
And Calchas, from the flight of birds who form'd
Presages of the future. And she named
Achilles: with what tenderness bewail'd
The unhappy Agamemnon! Of his wife
She ask'd me,—of his children: thence her race
This unknown virgin draws, an Argive; else
Ne'er would she send this letter, nor have wish'd
To know these things, as if she bore a share
(If Argos flourish) in its prosperous state.

PYLADES

Such were my thoughts (but thou hast given them words,
Preventing me) of every circumstance,
Save one: the fate of kings all know, whose state
Holds aught of rank. But pass to other thoughts.

ORESTES

What? Share them; so thou best mayst be inform'd.

PYLADES

That thou shouldst die, and I behold this light,
Were base: with thee I sail'd, with thee to die
Becomes me; else shall I obtain the name
Of a vile coward through the Argive state,
And the deep vales of Phocis. Most will think
(For most think ill) that by betraying thee
I saved myself, home to return alone;
Or haply that I slew thee, and thy death
Contrived, that in the ruin of thy house
Thy empire I might grasp, to me devolved
As wedded to thy sister, now sole heir.
These things I fear, and hold them infamous.
Behooves me then with thee to die, with thee
To bleed a victim, on the pyre with thine
To give my body to the flames; for this
Becomes me as thy friend, who dreads reproach.

ORESTES

Speak more auspicious words: 'tis mine to bear
Ills that are mine; and single when the wo,
I would not bear it double. What thou say'st
Is vile and infamous, would light on me,
Should I cause thee to die, who in my toils
Hast borne a share: to me, who from the gods
Suffer afflictions which I suffer, death
Is not unwelcome: thou art happy, thine
An unpolluted and a prosperous house;
Mine impious and unbless'd: if thou art saved,
And from my sister (whom I gave to thee,
Betroth'd thy bride) art bless'd with sons, my name
May yet remain, nor all my father's house
In total ruin sink. Go then, and live:
Dwell in the mansion of thy ancestors:
And when thou comest to Greece, to Argos famed
For warrior-steeds, by this right hand I charge thee
Raise a sepulchral mound, and on it place
A monument to me; and to my tomb
Her tears, her tresses let my sister give;
And say, that by an Argive woman's hand
I perish'd, to the altar's bloody rites
A hallow'd victim. Never let thy soul
Betray my sister, for thou seest her state,
Of friends how destitute, her father's house
How desolate. Farewell. Of all my friends,
Thee have I found most friendly, from my youth
Train'd up with me, in all my sylvan sports
Thou dear associate, and through many toils
Thou faithful partner of my miseries.
Me Phoebus, though a prophet, hath deceived,
And, meditating guile, hath driven me far
From Greece, of former oracles ashamed;
To him resign'd, obedient to his words,
I slew my mother, and my meed is death.

PYLADES

Yes, I will raise thy tomb: thy sister's bed
I never will betray, unhappy youth,
For I will hold thee dearer when thou art dead,
Than while thou livest; nor hath yet the voice
Of Phoebus quite destroy'd thee, though thou stand

To slaughter nigh; but sometimes mighty woes
Yield mighty changes, so when Fortune wills.

ORESTES

Forbear: the words of Phoebus naught avail me;
For, passing from the shrine, the virgin comes.
(IPHIGENIA *enters from the temple. She is carrying a letter.*)

IPHIGENIA (*to the guards*)

Go you away, and in the shrine prepare
What those, who o'er the rites preside, require.
(*The guards go into the temple.*)
Here, strangers, is the letter folded close:
What I would further, hear. The mind of man
In dangers, and again, from fear relieved,
Of safety when assured, is not the same:
I therefore fear lest he, who should convey
To Argos this epistle, when return'd
Safe to his native country, will neglect
My letter, as a thing of little worth.

ORESTES

What wouldst thou then? What is thy anxious thought?

IPHIGENIA

This: let him give an oath that he will bear
To Argos this epistle to those friends,
To whom it is my ardent wish to send it.

ORESTES

And wilt thou in return give him thy oath?

IPHIGENIA

That I will do, or will not do, say what.

ORESTES

To send him from this barbarous shore alive.

IPHIGENIA

That's just: how should he bear my letter else?

ORESTES

But will the monarch to these things assent?

IPHIGENIA

By me induced. Him I will see embark'd.

ORESTES
Swear then; and thou propose the righteous oath.

IPHIGENIA
This, let him say, he to my friends will give.

PYLADES
Well, to thy friends this letter I will give.

IPHIGENIA
Thee will I send safe through the darkening rocks.

PYLADES
What god dost thou invoke to attest thy oath?

IPHIGENIA
Diana, at whose shrine high charge I hold.

PYLADES
And I heaven's potent king, the awful Jove.

IPHIGENIA
But if thou slight thy oath, and do me wrong?

PYLADES
Never may I return. But if thou fail,
And save me not?

IPHIGENIA
Then never, while I live,
May I revisit my loved Argos more!

PYLADES
One thing, not mention'd, thy attention claims.

IPHIGENIA
If honour owes it, this will touch us both.

PYLADES
Let me in this be pardon'd, if the bark
Be lost, and with it in the surging waves
Thy letter perish, and I naked gain
The shore; no longer binding be the oath.

IPHIGENIA
Know'st thou what I will do? For various ills
Arise to those that plough the dangerous deep.
What in this letter is contain'd, what here

Is written, all I will repeat to thee,
That thou mayst bear my message to my friends.
'Gainst danger thus I guard: if thou preserve
The letter, that though silent will declare
My purport; if it perish in the sea,
Saving thyself, my words too thou wilt save.

PYLADES

Well hast thou said touching the gods and me.
Say then to whom at Argos shall I bear
This letter? What relate as heard from thee?

IPHIGENIA (*reading*)

This message to Orestes, to the son
Of Agamemnon, bear:—She, who was slain
At Aulis, Iphigenia, sends thee this:
She lives, but not to those who then were there.

ORESTES

Where is she? From the dead return'd to life?

IPHIGENIA

She whom thou seest: but interrupt me not.
To Argos, O my brother, ere I die,
Bear me from this barbaric land, and far
Remove me from this altar's bloody rites,
At which to slay the stranger is my charge.—

ORESTES

What shall I say? Where are we, Pylades?

IPHIGENIA

Or on thy house for vengeance will I call,
Orestes. Twice repeated, learn the name.

ORESTES

Ye gods!

IPHIGENIA

In my cause why invoke the gods?

ORESTES

Nothing: proceed: my thoughts were wandering wide:
Strange things of thee unask'd I soon shall learn.

IPHIGENIA

Tell him the goddess saved me, in exchange
A hind presenting, which my father slew
A victim, deeming that he plunged his sword
Deep in my breast: me in this land she placed.
Thou hast my charge: and this my letter speaks.

PYLADES

O, thou hast bound me with an easy oath:
What I have sworn with honest purpose, long
Defer I not, but thus discharge mine oath.
To thee a letter from thy sister, lo,
I bear, Orestes; and I give it thee.
(PYLADES *hands the letter to* ORESTES.)

ORESTES

I do receive it, but forbear to unclose
Its foldings, greater pleasure first to enjoy
Than words can give. My sister, O most dear,
Astonish'd ev'n to disbelief, I throw
Mine arms around thee with a fond embrace,
In transport at the wondrous things I hear.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Stranger, thou dost not well with hands profane
Thus to pollute the priestess of the shrine,
Grasping her garments hallow'd from the touch.

ORESTES

My sister, my dear sister, from one sire,
From Agamemnon sprung, turn not away,
Holding thy brother thus beyond all hope.

IPHIGENIA

My brother! Thou my brother! Wilt thou not
Unsay these words? At Argos far he dwells.

ORESTES

Thy brother, O unhappy! is not there.

IPHIGENIA

Thee did the Spartan Tyndarus bring forth?

ORESTES

And from the son of Pelops' son I sprung.

IPHIGENIA
What say'st thou? Canst thou give me proof of this?

ORESTES
I can: ask something of my father's house.

IPHIGENIA
Nay, it is thine to speak, mine to attend.

ORESTES
First let me mention things which I have heard
Electra speak: to thee is known the strife
Which fierce 'twixt Atreus and Thyestes rose.

IPHIGENIA
Yes, I have heard it; for the golden ram,—

ORESTES
In the rich texture didst thou not inweave it?

IPHIGENIA
O thou most dear! Thou windest near my heart.

ORESTES
And image in the web the averted sun?

IPHIGENIA
In the fine threads that figure did I work.

ORESTES
For Aulis did thy mother bathe thy limbs?

IPHIGENIA
I know it, to unlucky spousals led.

ORESTES
Why to thy mother didst thou send thy locks?

IPHIGENIA
Devoted for my body to the tomb.

ORESTES
What I myself have seen I now as proofs
Will mention. In thy father's house, hung high
Within thy virgin chambers, the old spear
Of Pelops, which he brandish'd when he slew
Oenomaus, and won his beauteous bride,
The virgin Hippodamia, Pisa's boast.

IPHIGENIA

O thou most dear (for thou art he), most dear
Acknowledged, thee, Orestes, do I hold,
From Argos, from thy country distant far?

ORESTES

And hold I thee, my sister, long deem'd dead?
Grief mix'd with joy, and tears, not taught by woe
To rise, stand melting in thy eyes and mine.

IPHIGENIA

Thee yet an infant in thy nurse's arms
I left, a babe I left thee in the house.
Thou art more happy, O my soul, than speech
Knows to express. What shall I say? 'tis all
Surpassing wonder and the power of words.

ORESTES

May we together from this hour be bless'd!

IPHIGENIA

An unexpected pleasure, O my friends,
Have I received; yet fear I from my hands
Lest to the air it fly. O sacred hearths
Raised by the Cyclops! O my country, loved
Mycenae! Now that thou didst give me birth,
I thank thee; now I thank thee, that my youth
Thou trainedst, since my brother thou has train'd,
A beam of light, the glory of his house.

ORESTES

We in our race are happy; but our life,
My sister, by misfortunes is unhappy.

IPHIGENIA

I was, I know, unhappy, when the sword
My father, frantic, pointed at my neck.

ORESTES

Ah me! methinks ev'n now I see thee there.

IPHIGENIA

When to Achilles, brother, not a bride,
I to the sacrifice by guile was led,
And tears and groans the altar compass'd round.

ORESTES

Alas, the lavers there!

IPHIGENIA

I mourn'd the deed
My father dared; unlike a father's love;
Cruel, unlike a father's love, to me.

ORESTES

Ill deeds succeed to ill: if thou hadst slain
Thy brother, by some god impell'd, what griefs
Must have been thine at such a dreadful deed!

IPHIGENIA (*chanting*)

Dreadful, my brother, O how dreadful! scarce
Hast thou escaped a foul, unhallow'd death,
Slain by my hands. But how will these things end?
What Fortune will assist me? What safe means
Shall I devise to send thee from this state,
From slaughter, to thy native land, to Argos,
Ere with thy blood the cruel sword be stain'd?
This to devise, O my unhappy soul!
This to devise is thine. Wilt thou by land,
Thy bark deserted, speed thy flight on foot?
Perils await thee mid these barbarous tribes,
Through pathless wilds; and 'twixt the clashing rocks,
Narrow the passage for the flying bark,
And long. Unhappy, ah, unhappy me!
What god, what mortal, what unlook'd-for chance
Will expedite our dangerous way, and show
Two sprung from Atreus a release from ills?

LEADER

What having seen and heard I shall relate,
Is marvellous, and passes fabling tales.

PYLADES

When after absence long, Orestes, friend
Meets friend, embraces will express their joy.
Behooves us now, bidding farewell to grief,
And heedful to obtain the glorious name
Of safety, from this barbarous land to fly.
The wise, of fortune not regardless, seize
The occasion, and to happiness advance.

ORESTES

Well hast thou said; and Fortune here, I ween,
Will aid us; to the firm and strenuous mind
More potent works the influence divine.

IPHIGENIA

Nothing shall check, nothing restrain my speech:
First will I question thee what fortune waits
Electra: this to know would yield me joy.

ORESTES

With him (*pointing to Pylades*) she dwells, and happy is her life.

IPHIGENIA

Whence then is he? and from what father sprung?

ORESTES

From Phocis: Strophius is his father named.

IPHIGENIA

By Atreus' daughter to my blood allied?

ORESTES

Nearly allied: my only faithful friend.

IPHIGENIA

He was not then, me when my father slew.

ORESTES

Childless was Strophius for some length of time.

IPHIGENIA

O thou, the husband of my sister, hail!

ORESTES

More than relation, my preserver too.

IPHIGENIA

But to thy mother why that dreadful deed?

ORESTES

Of that no more: to avenge my father's death.

IPHIGENIA

But for what cause did she her husband slay?

ORESTES

Of her inquire not: thou wouldst blush to hear.

IPHIGENIA
The eyes of Argos now are raised to thee.

ORESTES
There Menelaus is lord; I, outcast, fly.

IPHIGENIA
Hath he then wrong'd his brother's ruin'd house?

ORESTES
Not so: the Furies fright me from the land.

IPHIGENIA
The madness this, which seized thee on the shore?

ORESTES
I was not first beheld unhappy there.

IPHIGENIA
Stern powers! they haunt thee for thy mother's blood.

ORESTES
And ruthless make me champ the bloody bit.

IPHIGENIA
Why to this region has thou steer'd thy course?

ORESTES
Commanded by Apollo's voice, I come.

IPHIGENIA
With what intent? if that may be disclosed.

ORESTES
I will inform thee, though to length of speech
This leads. When vengeance from my hands o'ertook
My mother's deeds—foul deeds, which let me pass
In silence—by the Furies' fierce assaults
To flight I was impell'd: to Athens then
Apollo sent me, that, my cause there heard,
I might appease the vengeful powers, whose names
May not be utter'd: the tribunal there
Is holy, which for Mars, when stain'd with blood,
Jove in old times establish'd. There arrived,
None willingly received me, by the gods
As one abhorr'd; and they, who felt the touch
Of shame, the hospitable board alone

Yielded; and though one common roof beneath,
Their silence showing they disdain'd to hold
Converse with me, I took from them apart
A lone repast; to each was placed a bowl
Of the same measure; this they filled with wine,
And bathed their spirits in delight. Unmeet
I deem'd it to express offence at those
Who entertain'd me, but in silence grieved,
Showing a cheer as though I mark'd it not,
And sigh'd for that I shed my mother's blood.
A feast, I hear, at Athens is ordain'd
From this my evil plight, ev'n yet observed,
In which the equal-measured bowl then used
Is by that people held in honour high.
But when to the tribunal on the mount
Of Mars I came, one stand I took, and one
The eldest of the Furies opposite:
The cause was heard touching my mother's blood,
And Phoebus saved me by his evidence:
Equal, by Pallas number'd, were the votes,
And I from doom of blood victorious freed.
Such of the Furies as there sat, appeased
By the just sentence, nigh the court resolved
To fix their seat; but others, whom the law
Appeased not, with relentless tortures still
Pursued me, till I reach'd the hallow'd soil
Of Phoebus: stretch'd before his shrine, I swore
Foodless to waste my wretched life away,
Unless the god, by whom I was undone,
Would save me: from the golden tripod burst
The voice divine, and sent me to this shore,
Commanding me to bear the image hence,
Which fell from Jove, and in the Athenian land
To fix it. What the oracular voice assign'd
My safety, do thou aid: if we obtain
The statue of the goddess, I no more
With madness shall be tortured, but this arm
Shall place thee in my bark, which ploughs the waves
With many an oar, and to Mycenae safe
Bear thee again. Show then a sister's love,
O thou most dear; preserve thy father's house,
Preserve me too; for me destruction waits,
And all the race of Pelops, if we bear not
This heaven-descended image from the shrine.

LEADER

The anger of the gods hath raged severe,
And plunged the race of Tantalus in woes.

IPHIGENIA

Ere thy arrival here, a fond desire
To be again at Argos, and to see
Thee, my loved brother, fill'd my soul. Thy wish
Is my warm wish, to free thee from thy toils,
And from its ruins raise my father's house;
Nor harbour I 'gainst him, that slew me, thought
Of harsh resentment: from thy blood my hands
Would I keep pure, thy house I would preserve.
But from the goddess how may this be hid?
The tryant too I fear, when he shall find
The statue on its marble base no more.
What then from death will save me? What excuse
Shall I devise? Yet by one daring deed
Might these things be achieved: couldst thou bear hence
The image, me too in thy gallant bark
Placing secure, how glorious were the attempt!
Me if thou join not with thee, I am lost
Indeed; but thou, with prudent measures form'd,
Return. I fly no danger, not ev'n death,
Be death required, to save thee: no: the man
Dying is mourn'd, as to his house a loss;
But woman's weakness is of light esteem.

ORESTES

I would not be the murderer of my mother,
And of thee too; sufficient is her blood.
No; I will share thy fortune, live with thee,
Or with thee die: to Argos I will lead thee,
If here I perish not; or dying, here
Remain with thee. But what my mind suggests,
Hear: if Diana were averse to this,
How could the voice of Phoebus from his shrine
Declare that to the state of Pallas hence
The statue of the goddess I should bear,
And see thy face? All this, together weigh'd,
Gives hope of fair success, and our return.

IPHIGENIA
But how effect it, that we neither die,
And what we wish achieve? For our return
On this depends: this claims deliberate thought.

ORESTES
Have we not means to work the tyrant's death?

IPHIGENIA
For strangers full of peril were the attempt.

ORESTES
Thee would it save and me, it must be dared.

IPHIGENIA
I could not: yet thy promptness I approve.

ORESTES
What if thou lodge me in the shrine conceal'd?

IPHIGENIA
That in the shades of night we may escape?

ORESTES
Night is a friend to frauds, the light to truth.

IPHIGENIA
Within are sacred guards; we 'scape not them.

ORESTES
Ruin then waits us: how can we be saved?

IPHIGENIA
I think I have some new and safe device.

ORESTES
What is it? Let me know: impart thy thought.

IPHIGENIA
Thy sufferings for my purpose I will use,—

ORESTES
To form devices quick is woman's wit.

IPHIGENIA
And say, thy mother slain, thou fledd'st from Argos.

ORESTES
If to aught good, avail thee of my ills.

IPHIGENIA
Unmeet then at this shrine to offer thee.

ORESTES
What cause alleged? I reach not thine intent.

IPHIGENIA
As now impure: when hallow'd, I will slay thee.

ORESTES
How is the image thus more promptly gain'd?

IPHIGENIA
Thee I will hallow in the ocean waves.

ORESTES
The statue we would gain is in the temple.

IPHIGENIA
That, by thy touch polluted, I would cleanse.

ORESTES
Where? On the watery margin of the main?

IPHIGENIA
Where thy tall bark secured with cables rides.

ORESTES
And who shall bear the image in his hands?

IPHIGENIA
Myself; profaned by any touch but mine.

ORESTES
What of this blood shall on my friend be charged?

IPHIGENIA
His hands, it shall be said, like thine are stain'd.

ORESTES
In secret this, or to the king disclosed?

IPHIGENIA
With his assent; I cannot hide it from him.

ORESTES

My bark with ready oars attends thee near.

IPHIGENIA

That all be well appointed, be thy charge.

ORESTES

One thing alone remains; that these conceal
Our purpose: but address them, teach thy tongue
Persuasive words: a woman hath the power
To melt the heart to pity: thus perchance
All things may to our warmest wish succeed.

IPHIGENIA

Ye train of females, to my soul most dear,
On you mine eyes are turn'd, on you depends
My fate; with prosperous fortune to be bless'd,
Or to be nothing, to my country lost,
Of a dear kinsman and a much-loved brother
Deprived. This plea I first would urge, that we
Are women, and have hearts by nature form'd
To love each other, of our mutual trusts
Most firm preservers. Touching our design,
Be silent, and assist our flight: naught claims
More honour than the faithful tongue. You see
How the same fortune links us three, most dear
Each to the other, to revisit safe
Our country, or to die. If I am saved,
That thou mayst share my fortune, I to Greece
Will bring thee safe: but thee by this right hand,
Thee I conjure, and thee; by this loved cheek
Thee, by thy knees, by all that in your house
Is dearest to you, father, mother, child,
If you have children. What do you reply?
Which of you speaks assent? Or which dissents?
But be you all assenting: for my plea
If you approve not, ruin falls on me,
And my unhappy brother too must die.

LEADER

Be confident, loved lady and consult
Only thy safety: all thou givest in charge,
Be witness, mighty Jove, I will conceal.

IPHIGENIA

O, for this generous promise be you bless'd.
(*To* ORESTES *and* PYLADES)
To enter now the temple be thy part,
And thine: for soon the monarch of the land
Will come, inquiring if the strangers yet
Have bow'd their necks as victims at the shrine.
Goddess revered, who in the dreadful bay
Of Aulis from my father's slaughtering hand
Didst save me; save me now, and these: through thee,
Else will the voice of Phoebus be no more
Held true by mortals. From this barbarous land
To Athens go propitious: here to dwell
Beseems thee not; thine be a polish'd state!
(ORESTES, PYLADES, *and* IPHIGENIA *enter the temple.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O bird, that round each craggy height
Projecting o'er the sea below,
Wheelest thy melancholy flight,
Thy song attuned to notes of woe;
The wise thy tender sorrows own,
Which thy lost lord unceasing moan;
Like thine, sad halcyon, be my strain,
A bird, that have no wings to fly:
With fond desire for Greece I sigh,
And for my much-loved social train;
Sigh for Diana, pitying maid,
Who joys to rove o'er Cynthus' heights,
Or in the branching laurel's shade,
Or in the soft-hair'd palm delights,
Or the hoar olive's sacred boughs,
Lenient of sad Latona's woes;
Or in the lake, that rolls its wave
Where swans their plumage love to lave;
Then, to the Muses soaring high,
The homage pay of melody.

antistrophe 1

Ye tears, what frequent-falling showers
Roll'd down these cheeks in streams of woe,
When in the dust my country's towers
Lay levell'd by the conquering foe;

And, to their spears a prey, their oars
Brought me to these barbaric shores!
For gold exchanged, a traffic base,
No vulgar slave, the task is mine,
Here at Diana's awful shrine,
Who loves the woodland hind to chase,
The virgin priestess to attend,
Daughter of rich Mycenae's lord;
At other shrines her wish to bend,
Where bleeds the victim less abhorr'd:
No respite to her griefs she knows;
Not so the heart inured to woes,
As train'd to sorrow's rigid lore:
Now comes a change; it mourns no more:
But to long bliss when ill succeeds,
The anguish'd heart for ever bleeds.

strophe 2

Thee, loved virgin, freed from fear
Home the Argive bark shall bear:
Mountain Pan, with thrilling strain,
To the oars that dash the main
In just cadence well agreed,
Shall accord his wax-join'd reed:
Phoebus, with a prophet's fire
Sweeping o'er his seven-string'd lyre,
And his voice attuning high
To the swelling harmony,
Thee shall guide the wild waves o'er
To the soft Athenian shore.
Leaving me, thy oars shall sweep
Eager o'er the foaming deep:
Thou shalt catch the rising gales
Swelling in thy firm-bound sails;
And thy bark in gallant pride
Light shall o'er the billows glide.

antistrophe 2

Might I through the lucid air
Fly where rolls yon flaming car,
O'er those loved and modest bowers,
Where I pass'd my youthful hours,
I would stay my weary flight,
Wave no more my pennons light,

But, amid the virgin band,
Once my loved companions, stand:
Once mid them my charms could move,
Blooming then, the flames of love;
When the mazy dance I trod,
While with joy my mother glow'd;
When to vie in grace was mine,
And in splendid robes to shine;
For, with radiant tints impress'd,
Glow'd for me the gorgeous vest;
And these tresses gave new grace,
As their ringlets shade my face.

(THOAS *and his retinue enter.*)

THOAS

Where is the Grecian lady, to whose charge
This temple is committed? Have her rites
Hallow'd the strangers? Do their bodies burn
In the recesses of the sacred shrine?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

She comes, and will inform thee, king, of all.
(IPHIGENIA *comes out of the temple. She is carrying the sacred statue of Diana.*)

THOAS

Daughter of Agamemnon, what means this?
The statue of the goddess in thine arms
Why dost thou bear, from its firm base removed?

IPHIGENIA

There in the portal, monarch, stay thy step.

THOAS

What of strange import in the shrine hath chanced?

IPHIGENIA

Things ominous: that word I, holy, speak.

THOAS

To what is tuned thy proem? Plainly speak.

IPHIGENIA

Not pure the victims, king, you lately seized.

THOAS
What show'd thee this? Or speak'st thou but thy thought?

IPHIGENIA
Back turn'd the sacred image on its base.

THOAS
Spontaneous turn'd, or by an earthquake moved?

IPHIGENIA
Spontaneous, and, averted, closed its eyes.

THOAS
What was the cause? The blood-stain'd stranger's guilt?

IPHIGENIA
That, and naught else; for horrible their deeds.

THOAS
What, have they slain some Scythian on the shore?

IPHIGENIA
They came polluted with domestic blood.

THOAS
What blood? I have a strong desire to know.

IPHIGENIA
They slew their mother with confederate swords.

THOAS
O Phoebus! This hath no barbarian dared.

IPHIGENIA
All Greece indignant chased them from her realms.

THOAS
Bear'st thou for this the image from the shrine?

IPHIGENIA
To the pure air, from stain of blood removed.

THOAS
By what means didst thou know the stranger's guilt?

IPHIGENIA
I learn'd it as the statue started back.

THOAS
Greece train'd thee wise: this well hast thou discern'd.

IPHIGENIA
Now with sweet blandishments they soothe my soul.

THOAS
Some glozing tale from Argos telling thee?

IPHIGENIA
I have one brother: he, they say, lives happy,—

THOAS
That thou mayst save them for their pleasing news?

IPHIGENIA
And that my father lives, by fortune bless'd.

THOAS
But on the goddess well thy thoughts are turn'd.

IPHIGENIA
I hate all Greece; for it hath ruin'd me.

THOAS
What with the strangers, say then, should be done?

IPHIGENIA
The law ordain'd in reverence we must hold.

THOAS
Are then thy lavers ready, and the sword?

IPHIGENIA
First I would cleanse them with ablutions pure.

THOAS
In fountain waters, or the ocean wave?

IPHIGENIA
All man's pollutions doth the salt sea cleanse.

THOAS
More holy to the goddess will they bleed.

IPHIGENIA
And better what I have in charge advance.

THOAS
Doth not the wave ev'n 'gainst the temple beat?

IPHIGENIA
This requires solitude: more must I do.

THOAS
Lead where thou wilt: on secret rite I pry not.

IPHIGENIA
The image of the goddess I must cleanse.

THOAS
If it be stain'd with touch of mother's blood.

IPHIGENIA
I could not else have borne it from its base.

THOAS
Just is thy provident and pious thought;
For this by all the state thou art revered.

IPHIGENIA
Know'st thou what next I would?

THOAS
'Tis thine thy will
To signify.

IPHIGENIA
Give for these strangers chains.

THOAS
To what place can they fly?

IPHIGENIA
A Grecian knows
Naught faithful.

THOAS
Of my train go some for chains.
(*Some attendants go out.*)

IPHIGENIA
Let them lead forth the strangers.

THOAS
Be it so.

IPHIGENIA

And veil their faces.

THOAS

From the sun's bright beams?

IPHIGENIA

Some of thy train send with me.

THOAS

These shall go,

Attending thee.

IPHIGENIA

One to the city send.

THOAS

With what instructions charged?

IPHIGENIA

That all remain

Within their houses.

THOAS

That the stain of blood

They meet not?

IPHIGENIA

These things have pollution in them.

THOAS

Go thou, and bear the instructions.
(*An attendant departs.*)

IPHIGENIA

That none come

In sight.

THOAS

How wisely careful for the city!

IPHIGENIA

Warn our friends most.

THOAS

This speaks thy care for me.

IPHIGENIA
Stay thou before the shrine.

THOAS
To what intent?

IPHIGENIA
Cleanse it with lustral fires.

THOAS
That thy return

May find it pure?

IPHIGENIA
But when the strangers come
Forth from the temple,—

THOAS
What must I then do?

IPHIGENIA
Spread o'er thine eyes a veil.

THOAS
That I receive not

Pollution?

IPHIGENIA
Tedious if my stay appear,—

THOAS
What bounds may be assign'd?

IPHIGENIA
Deem it not strange.

THOAS
At leisure what the rites require perform.

IPHIGENIA
May this lustration as I wish succeed!

THOAS
Thy wish is mine.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES, *bound, are led from the temple in a solemn procession by the guards.* THOAS *and his retinue veil their heads as it slowly moves past.*)

IPHIGENIA (*chanting*)

But from the temple, see,
The strangers come, the sacred ornaments,
The hallow'd lambs—for I with blood must wash
This execrable blood away,—the light
Of torches, and what else my rites require
To purify these strangers to the goddess.
But to the natives of this land my voice
Proclaims, from this pollution far remove,
Art thou attendant at the shrine, who liftest
Pure to the gods thy hands, or nuptial rites
Dost thou prepare, or pregnant matron; hence,
Begone, that this defilement none may touch.
Thou, daughter of Latona and high Jove,
O royal virgin, if I cleanse the stain
Of these, and where I ought with holy rites
Address thee, thou shalt hold thy residence
In a pure mansion; we too shall be bless'd.
More though I speak not, goddess, unexpress'd,
All things to thee and to the gods are known.
(IPHIGENIA, *carrying the statue, joins the procession as it goes out.* THOAS *and his retinue enter the temple.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Latona's glorious offspring claims the song,
Born the hallow'd shades among,
Where fruitful Delos winds her valleys low;
Bright-hair'd Phoebus, skill'd to inspire
Raptures, as he sweeps the lyre,
And she that glories in the unerring bow.
From the rocky ridges steep,
At whose feet the hush'd waves sleep,
Left their far-famed native shore,
Them the exulting mother bore
To Parnassus, on whose heights
Bacchus shouting holds his rites;
Glittering in the burnish'd shade,
By the laurel's branches made,
Where the enormous dragon lies,
Brass his scales, and flame his eyes,
Earth-born monster, that around
Rolling guards the oracular ground;

Him, while yet a sportive child,
In his mother's arms that smiled,
Phoebus slew, and seized the shrine
Whence proceeds the voice divine:
On the golden tripod placed,
Throne by falsehood ne'er disgraced,
Where Castalia's pure stream flows,
He the fates to mortal shows.

antistrophe

But when Themis, whom of yore
Earth, her fruitful mother, bore,
From her hallow'd seat he drove,
Earth to avenge her daughter strove,
Forming visions of the night,
Which, in rapt dreams hovering light,
All that Time's dark volumes hold
Might to mortal sense unfold,
When in midnight's sable shades
Sleep the silent couch invades:
Thus did Earth her vengeance boast.
His prophetic honours lost,
Royal Phoebus speeds his flight
To Olympus, on whose height
At the throne of Jove he stands,
Stretching forth his little hands,
Suppliant that the Pythian shrine
Feel no more the wrath divine;
That the goddess he appease;
That her nightly visions cease.
Jove with smiles beheld his son
Early thus address his throne,
Suing with ambitious pride
O'er the rich shrine to preside;
He, assenting, bow'd his head.
Straight the nightly visions fled;
And prophetic dreams no more
Hover'd slumbering mortals o'er:
Now to Phoebus given again,
All his honours pure remain;
Votaries distant regions send
His frequented throne to attend:
And the firm decrees of fate

On his faithful voice await.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Say you, that keep the temple, and attend
The altar, where is Thoas, Scythia's king?
Open these strong-compacted gates, and call
Forth from the shrine the monarch of the land.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Wherefore? at thy command if I must speak.

MESSENGER

The two young men are gone, through the device
Of Agamemnon's daughter: from this land
They fly; and, in their Grecian galley placed,
The sacred image of the goddess bear.

LEADER

Incredible thy tale: but whom thou seek'st,
The monarch, from the temple went in haste.

MESSENGER

Whither? for what is doing he should know.

LEADER

We know not: but go thou, and seek for him:
Where'er thou find him, thou wilt tell him this.

MESSENGER

See, what a faithless race you women are!
In all that hath been done you have a part.

LEADER

Sure thou art mad! what with the strangers' flight
Have we to do? But wilt thou not, with all
The speed thou mayst, go to the monarch's house?

MESSENGER

Not till I first am well inform'd, if here
Within the temple be the king, or not.

(*Shouting*)

Unbar the gates (to you within I speak);
And tell your lord that at the portal here
I stand, and bring him tidings of fresh ills.
(THOAS *and his attendants enter from the temple.*)

THOAS

Who at the temple of the goddess dares
This clamour raise, and, thundering at the gates,
Strikes terror through the ample space within?

MESSENGER

With falsehoods would these women drive me hence,
Without to seek thee: thou wast in the shrine.

THOAS

With what intent? or what advantage sought?

MESSENGER

Of these hereafter; what more urgent now
Imports thee, hear: the virgin, in this place
Presiding at the altars, from this land
Is with the strangers fled, and bears with her
The sacred image of the goddess; all
Of her ablutions but a false pretence.

THOAS

How say'st thou? What is her accursed design?

MESSENGER

To save Orestes: this too will amaze thee.

THOAS

Whom? What Orestes? Clytemnestra's son?

MESSENGER

Him at the altar hallow'd now to bleed.

THOAS

Portentous! for what less can it be call'd?

MESSENGER

Think not on that, but hear me; with deep thought
Reflect: weigh well what thou shalt hear; devise
By what pursuit to reach and seize the strangers.

THOAS

Speak: thou advisest well: the sea though nigh,
They fly not so as to escape my spear.

MESSENGER

When to the shore we came, where station'd rode
The galley of Orestes, by the rocks

Their arms fierce darting, till our batter'd limbs
Were all disabled: now with dreadful marks
Disfigured, up the precipice we fly,
Some bearing on their heads, some in their eyes
The bloody bruises: standing on the heights,
Our fight was safer, and we hurl'd at them
Fragments of rocks; but, standing on the stern,
The archers with their arrows drove us thence;
And now a swelling wave roll'd in, which drove
The galley towards the land. The sailors fear'd
The sudden swell: on his left arm sustain'd,
Orestes bore his sister through the tide,
Mounted the bark's tall side, and on the deck
Safe placed her, and Diana's holy image,
Which fell from heaven; from the midship his voice
He sent aloud:—"Ye youths, that in this bark
From Argos plough'd the deep, now ply your oars,
And dash the billows till they foam: those things
Are ours, for which we swept the Euxine sea.
And steer'd our course within its clashing rocks."
They gave a cheerful shout, and with their oars
Dash'd the salt wave. The galley, while it rode
Within the harbour, work'd its easy way;
But having pass'd its mouth, the swelling flood
Roll'd on it, and with sudden force the wind
Impetuous rising drove it back: their oars
They slack'd not, stoutly struggling 'gainst the wave;
But towards the land the refluent flood impell'd
The galley: then the royal virgin stood,
And pray'd:—"O daughter of Latona, save me,
Thy priestess save; from this barbaric land
To Greece restore me, and forgive my thefts:
For thou, O goddess, dost thy brother love,
Deem then that I love those allied to me."
The mariners responsive to her prayer
Shouted loud paeans, and their naked arms,
Each cheering each, to their stout oars apply.
But nearer and yet nearer to the rock
The galley drove: some rush'd into the sea,
Some strain'd the ropes that bind the loosen'd sails.
Straight was I hither sent to thee, O king,
To inform thee of these accidents. But haste,
Take chains and gyves with thee; for if the flood

Subside not to a calm, there is no hope
Of safety to the strangers. Be assured,
That Neptune, awful monarch of the main,
Remembers Troy; and, hostile to the race
Of Pelops, will deliver to thy hands,
And to thy people, as is meet, the son
Of Agamemnon; and bring back to thee
His sister, who the goddess hath betray'd,
Unmindful of the blood at Aulis shed.

LEADER

Unhappy Iphigenia, thou must die,
Thy brother too must die, if thou again,
Seized in thy flight, to thy lord's hands shalt come.

THOAS

Inhabitants of this barbaric land,
Will you not rein your steeds, will you not fly
Along the shore, to seize whate'er this skiff
Of Greece casts forth; and, for your goddess roused,
Hunt down these impious men? Will you not launch
Instant your swift-oar'd barks, by sea, by land
To catch them, from the rugged rock to hurl
Their bodies, or impale them on the stake?
But for you, women, in these dark designs
Accomplices, hereafter, as I find
Convenient leisure, I will punish you.
The occasion urges now, and gives no pause.

(MINERVA *appears above.*)

MINERVA

Whither, O royal Thoas, dost thou lead
This vengeful chase? Attend: Minerva speaks.
Cease thy pursuit, and stop this rushing flood
Of arms; for hither, by the fateful voice
Of Phoebus, came Orestes, warn'd to fly
The anger of the Furies, to convey
His sister to her native Argos back,
And to my land the sacred image bear.
Thoas, I speak to thee: him, whom thy rage
Would kill, Orestes, on the wild waves seized,
Neptune, to do me grace, already wafts
On the smooth sea, the swelling surges calm'd.

And thou, Orestes (for my voice thou hear'st,
Though distant far), to my commands attend:
Go, with the sacred image, which thou bear'st,
And with thy sister: but when thou shalt come
To Athens built by gods, there is a place
On the extreme borders of the Attic land,
Close neighbouring to Carystia's craggy height,
Sacred; my people call it Alae: there
A temple raise, and fix the statue there,
Which from the Tauric goddess shall receive
Its name, and from thy toils, which thou, through Greece
Driven by the Furies' maddening stings, hast borne;
And mortals shall in future times with hymns
The Tauric goddess there, Diana, hail.
And be this law establish'd; when the feast
For thy deliverance from this shrine is held,
To a man's throat that they apply the sword,
And draw the blood, in memory of these rites,
That of her honours naught the goddess lose.
Thou, Iphigenia, on the hallow'd heights
Of Brauron on this goddess shalt attend
Her priestess, dying shalt be there interr'd,
Graced with the honours of the gorgeous vests
Of finest texture, in their houses left
By matrons who in childbed pangs expired.
These Grecian dames back to their country lead,
I charge thee; justice this return demands,
For I saved thee, when on the mount of Mars
The votes were equal; and from that decree
The shells in number equal still absolve.
But, son of Agamemnon, from this land
Thy sister bear; nor, Thoas, be thou angry.

THOAS

Royal Minerva, he that hears the gods
Commanding, and obeys not, is unwise.
My anger 'gainst Orestes flames no more,
Gone though he be, and bears with him away
The statue of the goddess, and his sister.
Have mortals glory 'gainst the powerful gods
Contending? Let them go, and to thy land
The sacred image bear, and fix it there;
Good fortune go with them. To favour Greece,

These dames, at thy high bidding, I will send.
My arms will I restrain, which I had raised
Against the strangers, and my swift-oar'd barks,
Since, potent goddess, this is pleasing to thee.

MINERVA

I praise thy resolution; for the power
Of Fate o'er thee and o'er the gods prevails.
Breathe soft, ye favouring gales, to Athens bear
These sprung from Agamemnon; on their course
Attending, I will go, and heedful save
My sister's sacred image. You too go (*to the* CHORUS)
Prosperous, and in the fate that guards you bless'd.
(MINERVA *vanishes.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O thou, among the immortal gods revered
And mortal men, Minerva, we will do
As thou commandest; for with transport high,
Exceeding hope, our ears receive thy words.

O Victory, I revere thy awful power: [3]
Guard thou my life, nor ever cease to crown me!

R. POTTER, whose translation of Aeschylus appeared in 1777, did a complete version of Euripides, which was published in 1781 and 1782. In the present rendering, Potter has followed the eighteenth century convention of using the Roman or Latin forms for various proper names. Hence Artemis and Athena appear as Diana and Minerva.

1. Modern editors do not assign the parts of this choral passage as they are found here.

2. The following lines seem to reflect Euripides' violent reaction against the taints of anthropomorphism in the orthodox theology. Cf. Plato's consistently held position that a god by his very nature must be good.

3. These closing lines, found also at the end of *The Phoenissae* and the *Orestes*, have nothing to do with the play, but are really a prayer for victory in the dramatic contest.

XI
ION

Characters in the Play

Mercury
Ion
Creusa, *daughter of Erechtheus*
Xuthus, *husband of* Creusa
Tutor
Attendant
Priestess of Apollo
Minerva
Chorus of Handmaidens of Creusa
Attendants of the Temple of Apollo

INTRODUCTION

THE *Ion*, though it cannot be accurately dated, in all probability falls among the later works of Euripides. The play deals with material not handled elsewhere in the extant Greek drama, and seems to depart somewhat from the norm of Greek tragic composition, even beyond the broader limits marked out for it by Euripides. The play opens with an unusually long prologue, spoken by the god Mercury, who incidentally does not figure at all in the subsequent action. We are told that Creusa, daughter of the legendary king of Athens, Erechtheus, had secretly borne a son to the god Apollo. This happened many years prior to the opening of the play. Creusa, in her shame, had exposed her new-born infant, and now supposes him dead, but Apollo with the help of Mercury had caused the child to be transported to Delphi, where he was reared by the Pythian priestess and has now reached young manhood. He does not know his parentage, but has devoted his life to the service of the oracular god and his temple. In the meantime, Creusa has married a certain Xuthus, but their union has been unblessed by offspring. As the play opens, it emerges that the unhappy couple have come to ask the assistance of Apollo to cure their childlessness.

Out of this dramatic situation the action of the *Ion* develops. In many ways the resultant piece seems to resemble more closely a Greek New Comedy than it does the normal tragedy. The ending of the play is happy: Ion is discovered to be Creusa's long-lost son, when, in a manner characteristic of the technique conventional in New Comedy, she recognizes the paraphernalia in which the child was exposed and which have been carefully preserved through the years by the Pythian priestess. In this respect the *Ion* constitutes evidence for the widely held critical thesis that the poets of the New Comedy were more influenced by and were more indebted to Euripides than to the writers of Old Comedy.

Attractive as the theory may be that the *Ion* is merely a Euripidean prototype of the New Comedy, there are in fact several elements in the play which are not easy to interpret on this hypothesis. One such element is the fact that there is present in certain passages an intense melodramatic tone which would not be found in the later comic poets. To illus-

trate, when the oracle deceitfully causes Xuthus to think that Ion is his son, born of a youthful escapade, his desire for parenthood is satisfied, but Creusa is insanely jealous. She plans to kill Ion, but the attempt at murder proves abortive, and she herself in a tense scene is on the point of being slain when the timely discovery that they are mother and son supervenes.

Likewise uncharacteristic of the New Comedy is the extent to which the gods and religion seem to be emphasized in the *Ion*. The interpretation of this aspect of the play has proved most difficult. Apollo appears in some ways as nothing but a seducer who tries desperately to save his face and the reputation of his oracle by using deception. In fact, even in the dénouement it becomes evident that Xuthus is never to be informed of the true parentage of Ion. Hence critics have been led to suppose that the play is one of Euripides' most telling indictments levelled against the orthodox anthropomorphic religion, which believes in such travesties of deity, and respects the lying and corrupt oracles of Delphi which do nothing except make for the perversion of true religion. Such an interpretation might be invalidated by urging that the gods and the divine elements in the play are merely technical instruments in the hands of the dramatist wherewith he is better able to develop and resolve his plot. Corollary to this theory would be the contention that Euripides is primarily interested in his dramatic situation, secondarily interested in portraying the characters of Ion, Creusa, and Xuthus when they are involved in this situation, and finally that the religious meaning is farthest from his thought and only apparently significant in the play because through the exigencies of his plot he has been forced to use gods as characters. Perhaps no final answer can be given to this problem of interpretation, but in any event, the play itself has enough intrinsic power to warrant placing it among the more interesting of Euripides' dramatic compositions.

ION

(SCENE:—*Before the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The sun is about to rise.* MERCURY *enters.*)

MERCURY

Atlas, that on his brazen shoulders rolls
Yon heaven, the ancient mansion of the gods,
Was by a goddess sire to Maia; she
To supreme Jove bore me, and call'd me Hermes;
Attendant on the king, his high behests
I execute. To Delphi am I come,
This land where Phoebus from his central throne
Utters to mortals his high strain, declaring
The present and the future; this is the cause;
Greece hath a city of distinguish'd glory,
Which from the goddess of the golden lance
Received its name; Erechtheus was its king;
His daughter, call'd Creusa, to the embrace
Of nuptial love Apollo strain'd perforce,
Where northward points the rock beneath the heights
Crown'd with the Athenian citadel of Pallas,
Call'd Macrai by the lords of Attica.
Her growing burden, to her sire unknown
(Such was the pleasure of the god), she bore,
Till in her secret chamber to a son
The rolling months gave birth: to the same cave,
Where by the enamour'd god she was compress'd,
Creusa bore the infant: there for death
Exposed him in a well-compacted ark
Of circular form, observant of the customs
Drawn from her great progenitors, and chief
From Erichthonius, who from the Attic earth
Deriv'd his origin: to him as guards
Minerva gave two dragons, and in charge

Consign'd him to the daughters of Aglauros:
This rite to the Erechthidae hence remains,
Mid serpents wreathed in ductile gold to nurse
Their children. What of ornament she had
She hung around her son, and left him thus
To perish. But to me his earnest prayer
Phoebus applied, "To the high-lineaged sons
Of glorious Athens go, my brother; well
Thou know'st the city of Pallas; from the cave
Deep in the hollow rock a new-born babe,
Laid as he is, and all his vestments with him,
Bring to thy brother to my shrine, and place
At the entrance of my temple; of the rest
(For, know, the child is mine) I will take care."
To gratify my brother thence I bore
The osier-woven ark, and placed the boy
Here at the temple's base, the wreathed lid
Uncovering, that the infant might be seen.
It chanced, as the orient sun the steep of heav'n
Ascended, to the god's oracular seat
The priestess entering, on the infant cast
Her eye, and marvelled, deeming that some nymph
Of Delphi at the fane had dared to lay
The secret burden of her womb: this thought
Prompts her to move it from the shrine: but soon
To pity she resign'd the harsh intent;
The impulse of the god secretly acting
In favour of the child, that in his temple
It might abide; her gentle hand then took it,
And gave it nurture; yet conceived she not
That Phoebus was the sire, nor who the mother
Knew aught, nor of his parents could the child
Give information. All his youthful years
Sportive he wandered round the shrine, and there
Was fed: but when his firmer age advanced
To manhood, o'er the treasures of the god
The Delphians placed him, to his faithful care
Consigning all; and in this royal dome
His hallow'd life he to this hour hath pass'd.
Meantime Creusa, mother of the child,
To Xuthus was espoused, the occasion this:—
On Athens from Euboean Chalcis roll'd
The waves of war; he join'd their martial toil,

And with his spear repell'd the foe; for this
To the proud honour of Creusa's bed
Advanc'd; no native, in Achaea sprung
From Aeolus, the son of Jove. Long time
Unbless'd with children, to the oracular shrine
Of Phoebus are they come, through fond desire
Of progeny: to this the god hath brought
The fortune of his son, nor, as was deem'd,
Forgets him; but to Xuthus, when he stands
This sacred seat consulting, will he give
That son, declared his offspring; that the child,
When to Creusa's house brought back, by her
May be agnized; the bridal rites of Phoebus
Kept secret, that the youth may claim the state
Due to his birth, through all the states of Greece
Named Ion, founder of the colonies
On the Asiatic coast. The laurell'd cave
Now will I visit, there to learn what fortune
Is to the boy appointed, for I see
This son of Phoebus issuing forth to adorn
The gates before the shrine with laurel boughs.
First of the gods I hail him by the name
Of Ion, which his fortune soon will give him.
(MERCURY *vanishes.* ION *and the attendants of the temple enter.*)

ION (*chanting*)

Now flames this radiant chariot of the sun
High o'er the earth, at whose ethereal fire
The stars into the sacred night retreat:
O'er the Parnassian cliffs the ascending wheels
To mortals roll the beams of day; the wreaths
Of incense-breathing myrrh mount to the roof
Of Phœbus' fane; the Delphic priestess now
Assumes her seat, and from the hallow'd tripod
Pronounces to the Greeks the oracular strains
Which the god dictates. Haste, ye Delphic train,
Haste to Castalia's silver-streaming fount;
Bathed in its chaste dews to the temple go;
There from your guarded mouths no sound be heard
But of good omen, that to those who crave
Admission to the oracle, your voice
May with auspicious words expound the answers.

My task, which from my early infancy
Hath been my charge, shall be with laurel boughs
And sacred wreaths to cleanse the vestibule
Of Phoebus, on the pavement moistening dews
To rain, and with my bow to chase the birds
Which would defile the hallow'd ornaments.
A mother's fondness, and a father's care
I never knew: the temple of the god
Claims then my service, for it nurtured me.

(*The attendants leave.* Ion *busies himself before the temple as he continues to sing.*)

strophe

Haste, thou verdant new-sprung bough,
Haste, thy early office know;
Branch of beauteous laurel come,
Sweep Apollo's sacred dome,
Cropp'd this temple's base beneath,
Where the immortal gardens breathe,
And eternal dews that round
Water the delicious ground,
Bathe the myrtle's tresses fair.
Lightly thus, with constant care,
The pavement of the god I sweep,
When over the Parnassian steep
Flames the bright sun's mounting ray;
This my task each rising day.
Son of Latona, Paean, Paean, hail!
Never, O never may thy honours fail!

antistrophe

Grateful is my task, who wait
Serving, Phoebus, at thy gate;
Honouring thus thy hallow'd shrine,
Honour for the task is mine.
Labouring with unwilling hands,
Me no mortal man commands:
But, immortal gods, to you
All my pleasing toil is due.
Phoebus is to me a sire;
Grateful thoughts my soul inspire;
Nurtured by thy bounty here,
Thee, Apollo, I revere;

And thy name in this rich seat
As a father's I repeat.
Son of Latona, Paean, Paean, hail!
Never, O never may thy honours fail!

Now from this labour with the laurel bough
I cease; and sprinkling from the golden vase
The chaste drops which Castalia's fountain rolls,
Bedew the pavement. Never may I quit
This office to the god; or, if I quit it,
Be it, good Fortune, at thy favouring call!
But see, the early birds have left their nests,
And this way from Parnassus wing their flight.
Come not, I charge you, near the battlements,
Nor near the golden dome. Herald of Jove,
Strong though thy beak beyond the feather'd kind,
My bow shall reach thee. Towards the altar, see,
A swan comes sailing: elsewhere wilt thou move
Thy scarlet-tinctured foot? or from my bow
The lyre of Phoebus to thy notes attuned
Will not protect thee; farther stretch thy wings;
Go, wanton, skim along the Delian lake,
Or wilt thou steep thy melody in blood.
Look, what strange bird comes onwards; wouldst thou fix
Beneath the battlements thy straw-built nest?
My singing bow shall drive thee hence; begone,
Or to the banks of Alpheus, gulfy stream,
Or to the Isthmian grove; there hatch thy young;
Mar not these pendent ornaments, nor soil
The temple of the god: I would not kill you:
'Twere pity, for to mortal man you bear
The message of the gods; yet my due task
Must be perform'd, and never will I cease
My service to the god who nurtured me.

(*The* CHORUS *enters. The following lines between* ION *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively as they gaze admiringly at the decorations on the temple.*)

CHORUS [1]

The stately column, and the gorgeous dome
Raised to the gods, are not the boast alone
Of our magnificent Athens; nor the statues
That grace her streets; this temple of the god,

Son of Latona, beauteous to behold,
Beams the resplendent light of both her children.

ION

Turn thine eyes this way; look, the son of Jove
Lops with his golden scimitar the heads
Of the Lernean Hydra: view it well.

CHORUS

I see him.

ION

And this other standing nigh,
Who snatches from the fire the blazing brand.

CHORUS

What is his name? the subject, on the web
Design'd, these hands have wrought in ductile gold.

ION

The shield-supporting Iolaus, who bears
The toils in common with the son of Jove.
View now this hero; on his winged steed
The triple-bodied monster's dreadful force
He conquers through the flames his jaws emit.

CHORUS

I view it all attentively.

ION

Observe
The battle of the giants, on the walls
Sculptured in stone.

CHORUS

Let us note this, my friends.

ION

See where against Enceladus she shakes
Her gorgon shield.

CHORUS

I see my goddess, Pallas.

ION

Mark the tempestuous thunder's flaming bolt
Launch'd by the hand of Jove.

CHORUS

The furious Mimas
Here blazes in the volley'd fires: and there
Another earth-born monster falls beneath
The wand of Bacchus wreathed with ivy round,
No martial spear. But, as 'tis thine to tend
This temple, let me ask thee, is it lawful,
Leaving our sandals, its interior parts
To visit?

ION

Strangers, this is not permitted.

CHORUS

Yet may we make inquiries of thee?

ION

Speak;
What wouldst thou know?

CHORUS

Whether this temple's site
Be the earth's centre?

ION

Ay, with garlands hung,
And gorgons all around.

CHORUS

So fame reports.

ION

If at the gate the honey'd cake be offer'd,
Would you consult the oracle, advance
To the altar: till the hallow'd lamb has bled
In sacrifice, approach not the recess.

CHORUS

I am instructed: what the god appoints
As laws, we wish not to transgress: without
Enough of ornament delights our eyes.

ION

Take a full view of all; that is allow'd.

CHORUS

To view the inmost shrine was our lord's order.

ION

Who are you call'd? Attendants on what house?

CHORUS

Our lords inhabit the magnific domes
Of Pallas.—But she comes, of whom thou askest.
(CREUSA *and attendants enter.*)

ION

Lady, whoe'er thou art, that liberal air
Speaks an exalted mind: there is a grace,
A dignity in those of noble birth,
That marks their high rank. Yet I marvel much
That from thy closed lids the trickling tear
Water'd thy beauteous cheeks, soon as thine eye
Beheld this chaste oracular seat of Phoebus.
What brings this sorrow, lady? All besides,
Viewing the temple of the god, are struck
With joy; thy melting eye o'erflows with tears.

CREUSA

Not without reason, stranger, art thou seized
With wonder at my tears: this sacred dome
Awakes the sad remembrance of things past.
I had my mind at home, though present here.
How wretched is our sex! And, O ye gods,
What deeds are yours! Where may we hope for right,
If by the injustice of your power undone?

ION

Why, lady, this inexplicable grief?

CREUSA

It matters not; my mind resumes its firmness:
I say no more; cease thy concern for me.

ION

But say, who art thou? whence? what country boasts
Thy birth? and by what name may we address thee?

CREUSA

Creusa is my name, drawn from Erechtheus
My high-born lineage; Athens gave me birth.

ION

Illustrious is thy state; thy ancestry
So noble, that I look with reverence on thee.

CREUSA

Happy indeed is this, in nothing farther.

ION

But tell me, is it true what fame has blazon'd?

CREUSA

What wouldst thou ask? Stranger, I wish to know.

ION

Sprung the first author of thy line from the earth?

CREUSA

Ay, Erichthonius; but my race avails not.

ION

And did Minerva raise him from the earth?

CREUSA

Held in her virgin hands: she bore him not.

ION

And gave him as the picture represents?

CREUSA

Daughters of Cecrops these, charged not to see him.

ION

The virgins ope'd the interdicted chest?

CREUSA

And died, distaining with their blood the rock.

ION

But tell me, is this truth, or a vain rumour?

CREUSA

What wouldst thou ask? I am not scant of time.

ION

Thy sisters did Erechtheus sacrifice?

CREUSA

He slew the virgins, victims for their country.

ION
And thou of all thy sisters saved alone?

CREUSA
I was an infant in my mother's arms.

ION
And did the yawning earth swallow thy father?

CREUSA
By Neptune's trident smote; and so he perish'd.

ION
And Macrai call you not the fatal place?

CREUSA
Why dost thou ask? What thoughts hast thou recall'd?

ION
Does Phoebus, do his lightnings honour it?

CREUSA
Honour! Why this? Would I had never seen it!

ION
Why? Dost thou hate the place dear to the god?

CREUSA
No: but for some base deed done in the cave.

ION
But what Athenian, lady, wedded thee?

CREUSA
Of Athens none, but one of foreign birth.

ION
What is his name? Noble he needs must be.

CREUSA
Xuthus, by Aeolus derived from Jove.

ION
How weds a stranger an Athenian born?

CREUSA
Euboea is a state neighbouring on Athens.

ION
A narrow sea flows, I have heard, between.

CREUSA
Joining the Athenian arms, that state he wasted.

ION
Confederate in the war, thence wedded thee?

CREUSA
The dowral meed of war, earn'd by his spear.

ION
Comest thou with him to Delphi, or alone?

CREUSA
With him, gone now to the Trophonian shrine.

ION
To view it, or consult the oracle?

CREUSA
Both that and this, anxious for one response.

ION
For the earth's fruits consult you, or for children?

CREUSA
Though wedded long, yet childless is our bed.

ION
Hast thou ne'er borne a child, that thou hast none?

CREUSA
My state devoid of children Phoebus knows.

ION
Bless'd in all else, luckless in this alone.

CREUSA
But who art thou? Bless'd I pronounce thy mother.

ION
Call'd as I am the servant of the god.

CREUSA
Presented by some state, or sold to this?

ION
I know not aught save this, I am the god's.

CREUSA
And in my turn, stranger, I pity thee.

ION
As knowing not my mother, or my lineage.

CREUSA
Hast thou thy dwelling here, or in some house?

ION
The temple is my house, ev'n when I sleep.

CREUSA
A child brought hither, or in riper years?

ION
An infant, as they say, who seem to know.

CREUSA
What Delphian dame sustain'd thee at her breast?

ION
I never knew a breast. She nourish'd me.

CREUSA
Who, hapless youth? Diseased, I find disease.

ION
The priestess: as a mother I esteem her.

CREUSA
Who to these manly years gave thee support?

ION
The altars, and the still-succeeding strangers.

CREUSA
Wretched, whoe'er she be, is she that bore thee.

ION
I to some woman am perchance a shame.

CREUSA
Are riches thine? Thou art well habited.

ION
Graced with these vestments by the god I serve.

CREUSA
Hast thou made no attempt to trace thy birth?

ION
I have no token, lady, for a proof.

CREUSA
Ah, like thy mother doth another suffer.

ION
Who? tell me: shouldst thou help me, what a joy!

CREUSA
One for whose sake I come before my husband.

ION
Say for what end, that I may serve thee, lady.

CREUSA
To ask a secret answer of the god.

ION
Speak it: my service shall procure the rest.

CREUSA
Hear then the tale: but Modesty restrains me.

ION
Ah, let her not; her power avails not here.

CREUSA
My friend then says that to the embrace of Phoebus—

ION
A woman and a god! Say not so, stranger.

CREUSA
She bore a son: her father knew it not.

ION
Not so: a mortal's baseness he disdains.

CREUSA
This she affirms; and this, poor wretch, she suffer'd.

ION
What follow'd, if she knew the god's embrace?

CREUSA
The child, which hence had birth, she straight exposed.

ION
This exposed child, where is he? doth he live?

CREUSA
This no one knows; this wish I to inquire.

ION
If not alive, how probably destroyed?

CREUSA
Torn, she conjectures, by some beast of prey.

ION
What ground hath she on which to build that thought?

CREUSA
Returning to the place she found him not.

ION
Observed she drops of blood distain the path?

CREUSA
None, though with anxious heed she search'd around.

ION
What time hath pass'd since thus the child was lost?

CREUSA
Were he alive, his youth were such as thine.

ION
The god hath done him wrong: the unhappy mother—

CREUSA
Hath not to any child been mother since.

ION
What if in secret Phoebus nurtures him!

CREUSA
Unjust to enjoy alone a common right.

ION
Ah me! this cruel fate accords with mine.

CREUSA
For thee too thy unhappy mother mourns.

ION
Ah, melt me not to griefs I would forget!

CREUSA
I will be silent: but impart thy aid.

ION
Seest thou what most the inquiry will suppress?

CREUSA
And to my wretched friend what is not ill?

ION
How shall the god what he would hide reveal?

CREUSA
As placed on the oracular seat of Greece.

ION
The deed must cause him shame: convict him not.

CREUSA
To the poor sufferer 'tis the cause of grief.

ION
It cannot be; for who shall dare to give
The oracle? With justice would the god,
In his own dome affronted, pour on him
Severest vengeance, who should answer thee.
Desist then, lady: it becomes us ill,
In opposition to the god, to make
Inquiries at his shrine; by sacrifice
Before their altars, or the flight of birds,
Should we attempt to force the unwilling gods
To utter what they wish not, 'twere the excess
Of rudeness; what with violence we urge
'Gainst their consent would to no good avail us:
What their spontaneous grace confers on us,
That, lady, as a blessing we esteem.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

How numberless the ills to mortal man,
And various in their form! One single blessing
By any one through life is scarcely found.

CREUSA

Nor here, nor there, O Phoebus, art thou just
To her; though absent, yet her words are present.
Nor didst thou save thy son, whom it became thee
To save; nor, though a prophet, wilt thou speak
To the sad mother who inquires of thee;
That, if he is no more, to him a tomb
May rise; but, if he lives, that he may bless
His mother's eyes. But even thus behooves us
To omit these things, if by the god denied
To know what most I wish.—But, for I see
The noble Xuthus this way bend, return'd
From the Trophonian cave; before my husband
Resume not, generous stranger, this discourse,
Lest it might cause me shame that thus I act
In secret, and perchance lead on to questions
I would not have explain'd. Our hapless sex
Oft feel our husbands' rigour: with the bad
The virtuous they confound, and treat us harshly.

(XUTHUS *and his retinue enter.*)

XUTHUS

With reverence to the god my first address
I pay: Hail, Phoebus! Lady, next to thee:
Absent so long, have I not caused thee fear?

CREUSA

Not much: as anxious thoughts 'gan rise, thou'rt come.
But, tell me, from Trophonius what reply
Bearest thou; what means whence offspring may arise?

XUTHUS

Unmeet he held it to anticipate
The answer of the god: one thing he told me.
That childless I should not return, nor thou,
Home from the oracle.

CREUSA

Goddess revered,
Mother of Phoebus, be our coming hither
In lucky hour; and our connubial bed
Be by thy son made happier than before!

XUTHUS

It shall be so. But who is president here?

ION

Without, that charge is mine; within, devolved
On others, stranger, seated near the tripod;
The chiefs of Delphi these, chosen by lot.

XUTHUS

'Tis well: all that I want is then complete.
Let me now enter: for the oracle
Is given, I hear, in common to all strangers
Before the shrine; on such a day, that falls
Propitious thus, the answer of the god
Would I receive: meanwhile, these laurel boughs
Bear round the altars; lady, breathe thy prayers
To every god, that from Apollo's shrine
I may bring back the promise of a son.
(XUTHUS, *after giving the laurel boughs to* CREUSA, *enters the temple.*)

CREUSA

It shall, it shall be so. Should Phoebus now
At least be willing to redress the fault
Of former times, he would not through the whole
Be friendly to us: yet will I accept
What he vouchsafes us, for he is a god.
(CREUSA *departs to the shrines in the outer precinct of the temple.*)

ION [2]

Why does this stranger always thus revile
With obscure speech the god? Is it through love
Of her, for whom she asks? or to conceal
Some secret of importance? But to me
What is the daughter of Erechtheus? Naught
Concerns it me. Then let me to my task,
And sprinkle from the golden vase the dew.
Yet must I blame the god, if thus perforce
He mounts the bed of virgins, and by stealth

Becomes a father, leaving then his children
To die, regardless of them. Do not thou
Act thus; but, as thy power is great, respect
The virtues; for whoe'er, of mortal men,
Dares impious deeds, him the gods punish: how
Is it then just that you, who gave the laws
To mortals, should yourselves transgress those laws?
If (though it is not thus, yet will I urge
The subject),—if to mortals you shall pay
The penalty of forced embraces, thou,
Neptune, and Jove, that reigns supreme in heaven,
Will leave your temples treasureless by paying
The mulcts of your injustice: for unjust
You are, your pleasures to grave temperance
Preferring: and to men these deeds no more
Can it be just to charge as crimes, these deeds
If from the gods they imitate: on those
Who gave the ill examples falls the charge.
(ION *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Thee prompt to yield thy lenient aid,
And sooth a mother's pain:
And thee, my Pallas, martial maid,
I call: O, hear the strain!
Thou, whom the Titan from the head of Jove,
Prometheus, drew, bright Victory, come,
Descending from thy golden throne above;
Haste, goddess, to the Pythian dome,
Where Phoebus, from his central shrine,
Gives the oracle divine,
By the raving maid repeated,
On the hallow'd tripod seated:
O haste thee, goddess, and with thee
The daughter of Latona bring;
A virgin thou, a virgin she,
Sisters to the Delphian king;
Him, virgins, let your vows implore,
That now his pure oracular power
Will to Erechtheus' ancient line declare
The blessing of a long-expected heir!

antistrophe

To mortal man this promised grace
Sublimest pleasure brings,
When round the father's hearth a race
In blooming lustre springs.
The wealth, the honours, from their high-drawn line
From sire to son transmitted down,
Shall with fresh glory through their offspring shine,
And brighten with increased renown:
A guard, when ills begin to lower,
Dear in fortune's happier hour;
For their country's safety waking,
Firm in fight the strong spear shaking;
More than proud wealth's exhaustless store,
More than a monarch's bride to reign,
The dear delight, to virtue's lore
Careful the infant mind to train.
Doth any praise the childless state?
The joyless, loveless life I hate;
No; my desires to moderate wealth I bound,
But let me see my children smile around.

epode

Ye rustic seats, Pan's dear delight;
Ye caves of Macrai's rocky height,
Where oft the social virgins meet,
And weave the dance with nimble feet;
Descendants from Aglauros they
In the third line, with festive play,
Minerva's hallow'd fane before
The verdant plain light-tripping o'er,
When thy pipe's quick-varying sound
Rings, O Pan, these caves around;
Where, by Apollo's love betray'd,
Her child some hapless mother laid,
Exposed to each night-prowling beast,
Or to the ravenous birds a feast;
For never have I heard it told,
Nor wrought it in historic gold,
That happiness attends the race,
When gods with mortals mix the embrace.

(Ion *re-enters.*)

ION

Ye female train, that place yourselves around
This incense-breathing temple's base, your lord
Awaiting, hath he left the sacred tripod
And oracle, or stays he in the shrine,
Making inquiries of his childless state?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yet in the temple, stranger, he remains.

ION

But he comes forth; the sounding doors announce
His near approach; behold, our lord is here.
(XUTHUS *enters from the temple. He rushes to greet* ION.)

XUTHUS

Health to my son! This first address is proper.

ION

I have my health: be in thy senses thou,
And both are well.

XUTHUS

O let me kiss thy hand,
And throw mine arms around thee.

ION

Art thou, stranger,
Well in thy wits? or hath the god's displeasure
Bereft thee of thy reason?

XUTHUS

Reason bids,
That which is dearest being found, to wish
A fond embrace.

ION

Off, touch me not; thy hands
Will mar the garlands of the god.

XUTHUS

My touch
Asserts no pledge: my own, and that most dear,
I find.

ION

Wilt thou not keep thee distant, ere
Thou hast my arrow in thy heart?

XUTHUS

Why fly me,
When thou shouldst own what is most fond of thee?

ION

I am not fond of curing wayward strangers,
And madmen.

XUTHUS

Kill me, raise my funeral pyre;
But, if thou kill me, thou wilt kill thy father.

ION

My father thou! how so? it makes me laugh
To hear thee.

XUTHUS

This my words may soon explain.

ION

What wilt thou say to me?

XUTHUS

I am thy father,
And thou my son.

ION

Who declares this?

XUTHUS

The god,
That nurtured thee, though mine.

ION

Thou to thyself
Art witness.

XUTHUS

By the oracle inform'd.

ION

Misled by some dark answer.

XUTHUS
Well I heard it.

ION
What were the words of Phoebus?

XUTHUS
That who first
Should meet me—

ION
How?—what meeting?

XUTHUS
As I pass'd
Forth from the temple.

ION
What the event to him?

XUTHUS
He is my son.

ION
Born so, or by some other
Presented?

XUTHUS
Though a present, born my son.

ION
And didst thou first meet me?

XUTHUS
None else, my son.

ION
This fortune whence?

XUTHUS
At that we marvel both.

ION
Who is my mother?

XUTHUS
That I cannot say.

ION

Did not the god inform thee?

XUTHUS

Through my joy,
For this I ask'd not.

ION

Haply from the earth
I sprung, my mother.

XUTHUS

No, the earth no sons
Produces.

ION

How then am I thine?

XUTHUS

I know not.
To Phoebus I appeal.

ION

Be this discourse
Chang'd to some other.

XUTHUS

This delights me most.

ION

Hast thou e'er mounted an unlawful bed?

XUTHUS

In foolishness of youth.

ION

Was that before
Thy marriage with the daughter of Erechtheus?

XUTHUS

Since never.

ION

Owe I then my birth to that?

XUTHUS

The time agrees.

ION
How came I hither then?

XUTHUS
I can form no conjecture.

ION
Was I brought
From some far distant part?

XUTHUS
That fills my mind
With doubtful musing.

ION
Didst thou e'er before
Visit the Pythian rock?

XUTHUS
Once, at the feast
Of Bacchus.

ION
By some public host received?

XUTHUS
Who with the Delphian damsels—

ION
To the orgies
Led thee, or how?

XUTHUS
And with the Maenades
Of Bacchus—

ION
In the temperate hour, or warm
With wine?

XUTHUS
Amid the revels of the god.

ION
From thence I date my birth.

XUTHUS

And fate, my son,
Hath found thee.

ION

How then came I to the temple?

XUTHUS

Perchance exposed.

ION

The state of servitude
Have I escaped.

XUTHUS

Thy father now, my son,
Receive.

ION

Indecent were it in the god
Not to confide.

XUTHUS

Thy thoughts are just.

ION

What else
Would we?

XUTHUS

Thou seest what thou oughtst to see.

ION

Am I the son then of the son of Jove?

XUTHUS

Such is thy fortune.

ION

Those that gave me birth
Do I embrace?

XUTHUS

Obedient to the god.

ION

My father, hail!

XUTHUS
That dear name I accept
With joy.

ION
This present day—

XUTHUS
Hath made me happy.

ION
O my dear mother, when shall I behold
Thy face? Whoe'er thou art, more wish I now
To see thee than before; but thou perchance
Art dead, and nothing our desires avail.

LEADER
We in the blessing of our house rejoice.
Yet wish we that our mistress too were happy
In children, and the lineage of Erechtheus.

XUTHUS
Well hath the god accomplish'd this, my son,
Discovering thee, well hath he joined thee to me;
And thou hast found the most endearing ties,
To which, before this hour, thou wast a stranger.
And the warm wish, which thou hast well conceived,
Is likewise mine, that thou mayst find thy mother;
I from what woman thou derivest thy birth.
This, left to time, may haply be discover'd.
Now quit this hallow'd earth, the god no more
Attending, and to mine accord thy mind,
To visit Athens, where thy father's sceptre,
No mean one, waits thee, and abundant wealth:
Nor, though thou grieve one parent yet unknown,
Shalt thou be censured as ignobly born,
Or poor: no, thou art noble, and thy state
Adorn'd with rich possessions. Thou art silent.
Why is thine eye thus fixed upon the ground?
Why on thy brow that cloud? The smile of joy
Vanish'd, thou strikest thy father's heart with fear.

ION
Far other things appear when nigh, than seen
At distance. I indeed embrace my fortune,

In thee my father found. But hear what now
Wakes sad reflections. Proud of their high race
Are your Athenians, natives of the land,
Not drawn from foreign lineage: I to them
Shall come unwelcome, in two points defective,
My father not a native, and myself
Of spurious birth: loaded with this reproach,
If destitute of power, I shall be held
Abject and worthless: should I rush among
The highest order of the state, and wish
To appear important, inferior ranks
Will hate me; aught above them gives disgust.
The good, the wise, men form'd to serve the state,
Are silent, nor at public honours aim
Too hastily: by such, were I not quiet
In such a bustling state, I should be deem'd
Ridiculous, and proverb'd for a fool.
Should I attain the dignity of those,
Whose approved worth hath raised them to the height
Of public honours, by such suffrage more
Should I be watch'd; for they that hold in states
Rule and pre-eminence, bear hostile minds
To all that vie with them. And should I come
To a strange house a stranger, to a woman
Childless herself, who that misfortune shared
Before with thee, now sees it her sole lot,
And feels it bitterly, would she not hate me,
And that with justice? When I stand before thee,
With what an eye would she, who hath no child,
Look on thy child? In tenderness to her,
Thy wife, thou must forsake me, or embroil
Thy house in discord, if thou favour me.
What murderous means, what poisonous drugs for men
Have women with inventive rage prepared!
Besides, I have much pity for thy wife,
Now growing old without a child, that grief
Unmerited, the last of her high race,
The exterior face indeed of royalty,
So causelessly commended, hath its brightness;
Within, all gloom: for what sweet peace of mind,
What happiness is his, whose years are pass'd
In comfortless suspicion, and the dread
Of violence? Be mine the humble blessings

Of private life, rather than be a king,
From the flagitious forced to choose my friends,
And hate the virtuous through the fear of death.
Gold, thou mayst tell me, hath o'er things like these
A sovereign power, and riches give delight:
I have no pleasure in this noisy pomp,
Nor, while I guard my riches, in the toil:
Be mine a modest mean that knows not care.
And now, my father, hear the happy state
I here enjoy'd; and first, to mortal man
That dearest blessing, leisure, and no bustle
To cause disturbance: me no ruffian force
Shoved from the way: it is not to be borne,
When every insolent and worthless wretch
Makes you give place. The worship of the god
Employ'd my life, or (no unpleasing task)
Service to men well pleased: the parting guest
I bade farewell—welcomed the new-arrived.
Thus something always new made every hour
Glide sweetly on; and to the human mind
That dearest wish, though some regard it not,
To be, what duty and my nature made me,
Just to the god: revolving this, my father,
I wish not for thy Athens to exchange
This state; permit me to myself to live;
Dear to the mind pleasures that arise
From humble life, as those which greatness brings.

LEADER

Well hast thou said, if those whom my soul holds
Most dear shall in thy words find happiness.

XUTHUS

No more of this discourse; learn to be happy.
It is my will that thou begin it here,
Where first I found thee, son; a general feast
Will I provide, and make a sacrifice,
Which at thy birth I made not: at my table
Will I receive thee as a welcome guest,
And cheer thee with the banquet, then conduct thee
To Athens with me as a visitant,
Not as my son: for, mid my happiness,
I would not grieve my wife, who hath no child.

But I will watch the occasions time may bring,
And so present thee, and obtain her leave
That thou mayst hold the sceptre which I bear.
Ion I name thee, as befits thy fortune,
As first thou met'st me from the hallow'd shrine
As I came forth; assemble then thy friends,
Invite them all to share the joyful feast,
Since thou art soon to leave the Delphic state.
And you, ye females, keep, I charge you, keep
This secret; she that tells my wife shall die.

ION

Let us then go; yet one thing to my fortune
Is wanting: if I find not her that bore me,
Life hath no joy. Might I indulge a wish,
It were to find her an Athenian dame,
That from my mother I might dare to assume
Some confidence; for he whose fortune leads him
To a free state proud of their unmix'd race,
Though call'd a citizen, must close his lips
With servile awe, for freedom is not his.

(XUTHUS *and* ION *go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Yes, sisters, yes, the streaming eye,
The swelling heart I see, the bursting sigh,
When thus rejoicing in his son
Our queen her royal lord shall find,
And give to grief her anguish'd mind,
Afflicted, childless, and alone.
What means this voice divine,
Son of Latona, fate-declaring power?
Whence is this youth, so fondly graced,
That to ripe manhood, from his infant hour,
Hath in thy hallow'd courts been plac'd
And nurtured at thy shrine?
Thy dark reply delights not me;
Lurking beneath close fraud I see:
Where will this end? I fear, I fear—
'Tis strange, and strange events must hence ensue:
But grateful sounds it to his ear,
The youth, that in another's state

(Who sees not that my words are true?)
Enjoys the fraud, and triumphs in his fate.

antistrophe

Say, sisters, say, with duteous zeal
Shall we this secret to our queen reveal?
She, to her royal lord resign'd,
With equal hope, with equal care,
Form'd her his joys, his griefs to share,
And gave him all her willing mind.
But joys are his alone;
While she, poor mourner, with a weight of woes,
To hoary age advancing, bends;
He the bright smile of prosperous fortune knows.
Ev'n thus, unhonour'd by his friends,
Plac'd on another's throne,
Mischance and ruin on him wait,
Who fails to guard its happy state.
Him may mischance and ruin seize,
Who round my lov'd queen spreads his wily trains.
No god may his oblation please,
No favouring flame to him ascend!
To her my faith, my zeal remains,
Known to her ancient royal house a friend.

epode

Now the father and the new-found son
The festive table haste to spread,
Where to the skies Parnassus lifts his head,
And deep beneath the hanging stone
Forms in its rudely-rifted side
A cavern wild and wide;
Where Bacchus, shaking high his midnight flames,
In many a light fantastic round
Dances o'er the craggy ground,
And revels with his frantic dames.
Ne'er to my city let him come,
This youth: no, rather let him die,
And sink into an early tomb!
With an indignant eye
Athens would view the stranger's pride
Within her gates triumphant ride:
Enough for her the honour'd race that springs
From old Erechtheus and her line of kings.

(CREUSA *and her aged* TUTOR *enter.*)

CREUSA

Thou venerable man, whose guiding voice
My father, while he lived, revered, advance
Up to the oracular seat thy aged steps;
That, if the royal Phoebus should pronounce
Promise of offspring, thou with me mayst share
The joy; for pleasing is it when with friends
Good fortune we receive; if aught of ill
(Avert it, Heaven!) befalls, a friend's kind eye
Beams comfort; thee, as once thou didst revere
My father, though thy queen, I now revere.

TUTOR

In thee, my child, the nobleness of manners
Which graced thy royal ancestors yet lives;
Thou never wilt disgrace thy high-born lineage.
Lead me, then, lead me to the shrine, support me:
High is the oracular seat, and steep the ascent;
Be thou assistant to the foot of age.

CREUSA

Follow; be heedful where thou set thy steps.

TUTOR

I am: my foot is slow, my heart hath wings.

CREUSA

Fix thy staff firm on this loose-rolling ground.

TUTOR

That hath no eyes; and dim indeed my sight.

CREUSA

Well hast thou said; on cheerful then, and faint not.

TUTOR

I have the will, but o'er constraint no power.

CREUSA

Ye females, on my richly-broider'd works
Faithful attendants, say, respecting children,
For which we came, what fortune hath my lord
Borne hence? if good, declare it: you shall find
That to no thankless masters you give joy.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O fortune!

CREUSA

To thy speech this is a proem
Not tuned to happiness.

LEADER

Unhappy fortune!
But why distress me for the oracle
Given to our lords? Be that as fate requires
In things which threaten death, what shall we do?

CREUSA

What means this strain of woe? Whence are these fears?

LEADER

What! shall we speak, or bury this in silence?

CREUSA

Speak, though thy words bring wretchedness to me.

LEADER

It shall be spoken, were I twice to die.
To thee, my queen, it is not given to clasp
In thy fond arms a child, or at thy breast
To hold it.

TUTOR

O my child, would I were dead!

CREUSA

Yes, this is wretchedness indeed, a grief
That makes life joyless.

TUTOR

This is ruin to us.

CREUSA

Unhappy me! this is a piercing grief,
That rends my heart with anguish.

TUTOR

Groan not yet.

CREUSA

Yet is the affliction present.

TUTOR
Till we learn—

CREUSA
To me what tidings?

TUTOR
If a common fate
Await our lord, partaker of thy griefs,
Or thou alone art thus unfortunate.

LEADER
To him, old man, the god hath given a son,
And happiness is his unknown to her.

CREUSA
To ill this adds the deepest ill, a grief
For me to mourn.

TUTOR
Born of some other woman
Is this child yet to come, or did the god
Declare one now in being?

LEADER
One advanced
To manhood's prime he gave him: I was present.

CREUSA
What hast thou said? Thy words denounce to me
Sorrows past speech, past utterance.

TUTOR
And to me.

CREUSA
How was this oracle accomplish'd? Tell me
With clearest circumstance: who is this youth?

LEADER
Him as a son Apollo gave, whom first,
Departing from the god, thy lord should meet.

CREUSA
O my unhappy fate! I then am left
Childless to pass my life, childless, alone,
Amid my lonely house! Who was declared?

Whom did the husband of this wretch first meet?
How meet him? Where behold him? Tell me all.

LEADER

Dost thou, my honoured mistress, call to mind
The youth that swept the temple? This is he.

CREUSA

O, through the liquid air that I could fly,
Far from the land of Greece, ev'n to the stars
Fix'd in the western sky! Ah me, what grief,
What piercing grief is mine!

TUTOR

Say, by what name
Did he address his son, if thou hast heard it?
Or does it rest in silence, yet unknown?

LEADER

Ion, for that he first advanced to meet him.

TUTOR

And of what mother?

LEADER

That I could not learn:
Abrupt was his departure (to inform thee
Of all I know, old man) to sacrifice,
With hospitable rites, a birthday feast;
And in the hallow'd cave, from her apart,
With his new son to share the common banquet.

TUTOR

Lady, we by thy husband are betrayed,
For I with thee am grieved, with contrived fraud
Insulted, from thy father's house cast forth.
I speak not this in hatred to thy lord,
But that I love thee more: a stranger he
Came to the city and thy royal house,
And wedded thee, all thy inheritance
Receiving, by some other woman now
Discover'd to have children privately:
How privately I'll tell thee: when he saw
Thou hadst no child, it pleased him not to bear
A fate like thine; but by some favourite slave,

His paramour by stealth, he hath a son.
Him to some Delphian gave he, distant far,
To educate; who to this sacred house
Consign'd, as secret here, received his nurture.
He knowing this, and that his son advanced
To manhood, urged thee to attend him hither,
Pleading thy childless state. Nor hath the god
Deceived thee: he deceived thee, and long since
Contrived this wily plan to rear his son,
That, if convicted, he might charge the god,
Himself excusing: should the fraud succeed,
He would observe the times when he might safely
Consign to him the empire of thy land.
And this new name was at his leisure form'd,
Ion, for that he came by chance to meet him.
I hate those ill-designing men, that form
Plans of injustice, and then gild them over
With artificial ornament: to me
Far dearer is the honest simple friend,
Than one whose quicker wit is train'd to ill.
And to complete this fraud, thou shalt be urged
To take into thy house, to lord it there,
This low-born youth, this offspring of a slave.
Though ill, it had been open, had he pleaded
Thy want of children, and, thy leave obtain'd,
Brought to thy house a son that could have boasted
His mother noble; or, if that displeased thee,
He might have sought a wife from Aeolus.
Behooves thee then to act a woman's part,
Or grasp the sword, or drug the poison'd bowl,
Or plan some deep design to kill thy husband,
And this his son, before thou find thy death
From them: if thou delay, thy life is lost:
For when beneath one roof two foes are met,
The one must perish. I with ready zeal
Will aid thee in this work, and kill the youth,
Entering the grot where he prepares the feast;
Indifferent in my choice, so that I pay
What to my lords I owe, to live or die.
If there is aught that causes slaves to blush,
It is the name; in all else than the free
The slave is nothing worse, if he be virtuous.

LEADER

I too, my honour'd queen, with cheerful mind
Will share thy fate, or die, or live with honour.

CREUSA (*chanting*)

How, O my soul, shall I be silent, how
Disclose this secret? Can I bid farewell
To modesty? What else restrains my tongue?
To how severe a trial am I brought!
Hath not my husband wrong'd me? Of my house
I am deprived, deprived of children; hope
Is vanish'd, which my heart could not resign,
With many an honest wish this furtive bed
Concealing, this lamented bed concealing.
But by the star-bespangled throne of Jove,
And by the goddess high above my rocks
Enshrined, by the moist banks that bend around
The hallow'd lake by Triton form'd, no longer
Will I conceal this bed, but ease my breast,
The oppressive load discharged. Mine eyes drop tears,
My soul is rent, to wretchedness ensnared
By men, by gods, whom I will now disclose,
Unkind betrayers of the beds they forced.
O thou, that wakest on thy seven-string'd lyre
Sweet notes, that from the rustic lifeless horn
Enchant the ear with heavenly melody,
Son of Latona, thee before this light
Will I reprove. Thou camest to me, with gold
Thy locks all glittering, as the vermeil flowers
I gather'd in my vest to deck my bosom
With the spring's glowing hues; in my white hand
Thy hand enlocking, to the cavern'd rock
Thou led'st me; naught avail'd my cries, that call'd
My mother; on thou led'st me, wanton god,
Immodestly, to Venus paying homage.
A son I bare thee, O my wretched fate!
Him (for I fear'd my mother) in thy cave
I placed, where I unhappy was undone
By thy unhappy love. Woe, woe is me!
And now my son and thine, ill-fated babe,
Is rent by ravenous vultures; thou, meanwhile,
Art to thy lyre attuning strains of joy.
Son of Latona, thee I call aloud,

Who from thy golden seat, thy central throne,
Utterest thine oracle: my voice shall reach
Thine ear: ungrateful lover, to my husband,
No grace requiting, thou hast given a son
To bless his house; my son and thine, unown'd,
Perish'd a prey to birds; the robes that wrapp'd
The infant's limbs, his mother's work, lost with him.
Delos abhors thee, and the laurel boughs
With the soft foliage of the palm o'erhung,
Grasping whose round trunk with her hands divine,
Latona thee, her hallow'd offspring, bore.

LEADER

Ah, what a mighty treasury of ills
Is open'd here, a copious source of tears!

TUTOR

Never, my daughter, can I sate my eyes
With looking on thy face: astonishment
Bears me beyond my senses. I had stemm'd
One tide of evils, when another flood
High-surging overwhelm'd me from the words
Which thou hast utter'd, from the present ills
To an ill train of other woes transferr'd.
What say'st thou? Of what charge dost thou implead
The god? What son hast thou brought forth? Where placed him
A feast for vultures? Tell me all again.

CREUSA

Though I must blush, old man, yet I will speak.

TUTOR

I mourn with generous grief at a friend's woes.

CREUSA

Hear then: the northward-pointing cave thou knowest,
And the Cecropian rocks, which we call Macrai.

TUTOR

Where stands a shrine to Pan, and altars nigh.

CREUSA

There in a dreadful conflict I engaged.

TUTOR

What! my tears rise ready to meet thy words.

CREUSA
By Phoebus drawn reluctant to his bed.

TUTOR
Was this, my daughter, such as I suppose?

CREUSA
I know not: but if truth, I will confess it.

TUTOR
Didst thou in silence mourn this secret ill?

CREUSA
This was the grief I now disclose to thee.

TUTOR
This love of Phoebus how didst thou conceal?

CREUSA
I bore a son. Hear me, old man, with patience.

TUTOR
Where? who assisted? or wast thou alone?

CREUSA
Alone, in the same cave where compress'd.

TUTOR
Where is thy son, that childless now no more—

CREUSA
Dead, good old man, to beasts of prey exposed.

TUTOR
Dead! and the ungrateful Phoebus gives no aid?

CREUSA
None: in the house of Pluto a young guest.

TUTOR
Whose hands exposed him? Surely not thine own.

CREUSA
Mine, in the shades of night, wrapp'd in his vests.

TUTOR
Hadst thou none with thee conscious to this deed?

CREUSA
My misery, and the secret place alone.

TUTOR
How durst thou in a cavern leave thy son?

CREUSA
How? uttering many sad and plaintive words.

TUTOR
Ah, cruel was thy deed, the god more cruel.

CREUSA
Hadst thou but seen him stretch his little hands!

TUTOR
Seeking the breast, or reaching to thine arms?

CREUSA
To this, deprived of which he suffer'd wrong.

TUTOR
And what induced thee to expose thy child?

CREUSA
Hope that the god's kind care would save his son.

TUTOR
How are the glories of thy house destroy'd!

CREUSA
Why, thine head cover'd, dost thou pour these tears?

TUTOR
To see thee and thy father thus unhappy.

CREUSA
This is the state of man: nothing stands firm.

TUTOR
No longer then, my child, let grief oppress us.

CREUSA
What should I do? In misery all is doubt.

TUTOR
First on the god that wrong'd thee be avenged.

CREUSA
How shall a mortal 'gainst a god prevail?

TUTOR
Set this revered oracular shrine on fire.

CREUSA
I fear: ev'n now I have enough of ills.

TUTOR
Attempt what may be done then; kill thy husband.

CREUSA
The nuptial bed I reverence, and his goodness.

TUTOR
This son then, which is now brought forth against thee.

CREUSA
How? Could that be, how warmly should I wish it.

TUTOR
Thy train hath swords: instruct them to the deed.

CREUSA
I go with speed: but where shall it be done?

TUTOR
In the hallow'd tent, where now he feasts his friends.

CREUSA
An open murder, and with coward slaves!

TUTOR
If mine displease, propose thou some design.

CREUSA
I have it, close and easy to achieve.

TUTOR
In both my faithful services are thine.

CREUSA
Hear then: not strange to thee the giants' war.

TUTOR
When they in Phlegra fought against the gods.

CREUSA
There the earth brought forth the Gorgon, horrid monster.

TUTOR
In succour of her sons to annoy the gods?

CREUSA
Ev'n so: her Pallas slew, daughter of Jove.

TUTOR
What fierce and dreadful form did she then wear?

CREUSA
Her breastplate arm'd with vipers wreathed around.

TUTOR
A well-known story; often have I heard it.

CREUSA
Her spoils before her breast Minerva wore.

TUTOR
The aegis; so they call the vest of Pallas.

CREUSA
So named, when in the war she join'd the gods.

TUTOR
But how can this, my child, annoy thy foes?

CREUSA
Thou canst not but remember Erichthonius.

TUTOR
Whom first of thy high race the earth brought forth.

CREUSA
To him while yet an infant Pallas gave—

TUTOR
What? Thy slow preface raises expectation.

CREUSA
Two drops of blood that from the Gorgon fell.

TUTOR
And on the human frame what power have these?

CREUSA
The one works death, the other heals disease.

TUTOR
In what around the infant's body hung?

CREUSA
Enclosed in gold: he gave them to my father.

TUTOR
At his decease then they devolved to thee?

CREUSA
Ay, and I wear it as a bracelet; look.

TUTOR
Their double qualities how temper'd, say.

CREUSA
This drop, which from her hollow vein distill'd,—

TUTOR
To what effect applied? What is its power?

CREUSA
Medicinal, of sovereign use to life.

TUTOR
The other drop, what faculties hath that?

CREUSA
It kills, the poison of the Gorgon dragons.

TUTOR
And dost thou bear this gore blended in one?

CREUSA
No, separate; for with ill good mixes not.

TUTOR
O my dear child, thou hast whate'er we want.

CREUSA
With this the boy shall die, and thou shalt kill him.

TUTOR
Where? How? 'Tis thine to speak, to dare be mine.

CREUSA
At Athens, when he comes beneath my roof.

TUTOR
I like not this; what I proposed displeased.

CREUSA
Dost thou surmise what enters now my thoughts?

TUTOR
Suspicion waits thee, though thou kill him not.

CREUSA
Thou hast judged well: a stepdame's hate is proverb'd.

TUTOR
Then kill him here; thou mayst disown the deed.

CREUSA
My mind ev'n now anticipates the pleasure.

TUTOR
Thus shalt thou meet thy husband's wiles with wiles.

CREUSA
This shalt thou do: this little golden casket
Take from my hand, Minerva's gift of old;
To where my husband secretly prepares
The sacrifice, bear this beneath thy vest.
That supper ended, when they are to pour
Libations to the gods, thou mayst infuse
In the youth's goblet this: but take good heed,
Let none observe thee; drug his cup alone
Who thinks to lord it in my house: if once
It pass his lips, his foot shall never reach
Illustrious Athens: death awaits him here.
(*She gives him the casket.*)

TUTOR
Go thou then to the hospitable house
Prepared for thy reception: be it mine,
Obedient to thy word to do this deed.
Come then, my aged foot, be once more young
In act, though not in years, for past recall
That time is fled: kill him, and bear him forth.
Well may the prosperous harbour virtuous thought;

But when thou wouldst avenge thee on thy foes,
There is no law of weight to hinder thee.

(*They both go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Daughter of Ceres, Trivia hear,
Propitious regent of each public way
Amid the brightness of the day,
Nor less when night's dark hour engenders fear;
The fulness of this goblet guide
To check with death this stripling's pride,
For whom my queen this fatal draught prepares,
Tinged with the Gorgon's venom'd gore:
That seat, which mid Erechtheus' royal heirs
His pride claims, it shall claim no more:
Never may one of alien blood disgrace
The imperial honours of that high-born race!

antistrophe 1

Should not this work of fate succeed,
Nor the just vengeance of my queen prevail;
Should this apt time of daring fail,
And hope, that flatters now, desert the deed;
Slaughter shall other means afford,
The strangling cord, the piercing sword;
For rage from disappointed rage shall flow,
And try each various form of death;
For never shall my queen this torment know;
Ne'er while she draws this vital breath,
Brook in her house that foreign lords should shine,
Clothed with the splendours of her ancient line.

strophe 2

Thou whom the various hymn delights,
Then thy bright choir of beauteous dames among,
Dancing the stream's soft brink along,
Thou seest the guardian of thy mystic rites,
Thy torch its midnight vigils keep,
Thine eye meantime disdaining sleep;
While with thee dances Jove's star-spangled plain,
And the moon dances up the sky:
Ye nymphs, that lead to grots your frolic train,
Beneath the gulfy founts that lie;

Thou gold-crown'd queen, through night's dark regions fear'd,
And thou, her mother, power revered,
How should I blush to see this youth unknown!
This Delphic vagrant, hope to seize the throne.

antistrophe 2

You, who the melting soul to move,
In loose, dishonest airs the Muse employ
To celebrate love's wanton joy,
The joy of unallow'd, unholy love,
See how our pure and modest law
Can lavish man's lewd deeds o'erawe!
Ye shameless bards, revoke each wanton air;
No more these melting measures frame;
Bid the chaste muse in Virtue's cause declare,
And mark man's lawless bed with shame!
Ungrateful is this Jove-descended lord;
For, his wife's childless bed abhorr'd,
Lewdly he courts the embrace of other dames,
And with a spurious son his pride inflames.

(*An* ATTENDANT *of* CREUSA *enters.*)

ATTENDANT

Athenian dames, where shall I find our queen,
The daughter of Erechtheus? Seeking her,
This city have I walked around in vain.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And for what cause, my fellow-slave? What means
Thy hasty foot? What tidings dost thou bring?

ATTENDANT

We are discover'd; and the rulers here
Seek her, that she may die o'erwhelm'd with stones.

LEADER

Ah me! what wouldst thou say? Are our designs
Of secret ruin to this youth disclosed?

ATTENDANT

They are; and know, the worst of ills await you.

LEADER

How were our dark devices brought to light?

ATTENDANT

The god, that justice might receive no stain
Caused it to triumph o'er defeated wrong.

LEADER

How? as a suppliant, I conjure thee, tell me
Of this inform'd, if we must die, more freely
Wish we to die than see the light of heaven.

ATTENDANT

Soon as the husband of Creusa left
The god's oracular shrine, this new-found son
He to the feast, and sacrifice prepared
To the high gods, led with him. Xuthus then
Went where the hallow'd flame of Bacchus mounts,
That on each rock's high point the victim's blood
Might flow, a grateful offering for his son
Thus recognised, to whom he gave in charge,
"Stay thou, and with the artist's expert aid
Erect the sheltering tent: my rites perform'd
To the kind gods that o'er the genial bed
Preside, should I be there detain'd too long,
Spread the rich table to my present friends."
This said, he led the victims to the rocks.
Meanwhile with reverent heed the son 'gan rear
On firm supporters the wide tent, whose sides
No masonry require, yet framed to exclude
The mid-day sun's hot beams, or his last rays
When sinking in the west: the lengthen'd lines
Equally distant comprehend a square
Of twice five thousand feet (the skilful thus
Compute it), space to feast (for so he will'd)
All Delphi: from the treasures of the god
He took the sacred tapestry, and around
Hung the rich shade, on which the admiring eye
Gazes with fix'd delight: [3] first over head,
Like a broad pennon spread the extended woof,
Which from the Amazonian spoils the son
Of Jove, Alcides, hallow'd to the god;
In its bright texture interwov'n a sky
Gathering the stars in its ethereal round,
While downwards to the western wave the sun
His steeds declines, and to his station high
Draws up the radiant flame of Hesperus.

Meanwhile the Night robed in her sable stole,
Her unreign'd car advances; on her state
The stars attend; the Pleiads mounting high,
And with his glittering sword Orion arm'd;
Above, Arcturus to the golden pole
Inclines; full-orb'd the month-dividing moon
Takes her bright station, and the Hyades
Marked by the sailor: distant in the rear,
Aurora ready to relume the day,
And put the stars to flight. The sides were graced
With various textures of the historic woof,
Barbaric arguments; in gallant trim
Against the fleet of Greece the hostile fleet
Rides proudly on. Here monstrous forms portray'd
Human and brutal mix'd: the Thracian steeds
Are seized, the hinds, and the adventurous chase
Of savage lions: figured nigh the doors,
Cecrops, attended by his daughter's, roll'd
His serpent train: in the ample space within
He spread the festal table, richly deck'd
With golden goblets. Now the herald walk'd
His round, each native that inclined to grace
The feast inviting: to the crowded tent
They hasten, crown'd with garlands, and partake
The exquisite repast. The pleasured sense
Now satiate, in the midst an old man stood,
Officious in his ministry, which raised
Much mirth among the guests; for from the urns
He fill'd the lavers, and with fragrant myrrh
Incensed the place; the golden bowls he claim'd
His charge. When now the jocund pipes 'gan breathe
Harmonious airs, and the fresh goblet stood
Ready to walk its round, the old man said,
"Away with these penurious cups, and bring
Capacious bowls; so shall you quickly bathe
Your spirits in delight." With speed were brought
Goblets of gold and silver: one he took
Of choicer frame; and, seemingly intent
To do his young lord honour, the full vase
Gave to his hands, but in the wine infused
A drug of poisonous power, which, it is said,
His queen supplied, that the new son no more
Might view the light of heav'n; but unobserved

He mix'd it. As the youth among the rest
Pour'd the libation, 'mid the attendant slaves
Words of reproach one utter'd: he, as train'd
Within the temple and with expert seers,
Deem'd them of evil omen, and required
Another goblet to be filled afresh:
The former a libation to the god,
He cast upon the ground, instructing all
To pour, like him, the untasted liquor down.
Silence ensued: the sacred bowls we fill
With wines of Byblos; when a troop of doves
Came fluttering in, for undisturb'd they haunt
The dome of Phoebus: in the floating wine
They dipp'd their bills to drink, then raised their heads,
Gurgling it down their beauteous-plumed throats.
Harmless to all the spilt wine, save to her
That lighted where the youth had pour'd his bowl:
She drank, and straight convulsive shiverings seized
Her beauteous plumes; around in giddy rings
She whirl'd, and in a strange and mournful note
Seem'd to lament: amazement seized the guests,
Seeing the poor bird's pangs: her heart heaved thick,
And stretching out her scarlet legs, she died.
Rending his robes, the son of Phoebus given
Sprung from the table, and aloud exclaim'd,—
"What wretch design'd to kill me? Speak, old man:
Officious was thy ministry; the bowl
I from thy hand received." Then straight he seized
His aged arm, and to the question held him,
As in the fact discover'd: he thus caught,
Reluctant and constrain'd, own'd the bold deed,
The deadly goblet by Creusa drugg'd.
Forth from the tent, the guests attending, rush'd
The youth announced by Phoebus, and amid
The Pythian regents says,—"O hallow'd land!
This stranger dame, this daughter of Erechtheus
Attempts my life by poison." Then decreed
The Delphian lords (nor did one voice dissent)
That she should die, my mistress, from the rock
Cast headlong, as the deed was aim'd against
A sacred life, and impiously presumed
This hallow'd place with murder to profane.
Demanded by the state, she this way bends

Her wretched steps. Unhappy to this shrine
She came through fond desire of children; here,
Together with her hopes, her life is lost.

CHORUS (*singing*)

None, there is none, from death no flight,
To me no refuge; our dark deed
Betray'd, betray'd to open light;
The festive bowl, with sprightly wine that flow'd
Mix'd with the Gorgon's viperous blood,
An offering to the dead decreed,
All is betray'd to light: and I,
Cast headlong from the rock, must die.
What flight shall save me from this death,
Borne on swift pinions through the air,
Sunk to the darksome cave beneath,
Or mounted on the rapid car?
Or shall the flying bark unfurl its sails?
Alas, my queen, no flight avails,
Save when some god's auspicious power
Shall snatch us from the dangerous hour.
Unhappy queen, what pangs shall rend thy heart!
Shall we, who plann'd the deathful deed,
Be caught within the toils we spread,
While Justice claims severe her chast'ning part?

(CREUSA *rushes in.*)

CREUSA

I am pursued, ye faithful females, doom'd
To death: the Pythian council hath decreed it:
My life is forfeited.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Unhappy lady,
We know the dreadful ills that close thee round.

CREUSA

Ah, whither shall I fly? From instant death
Scarce hath my foot sped hither, from my foes
By stealth escaping.

LEADER

Whither wouldst thou fly,
But to this altar?

CREUSA
What will that avail me?

LEADER
To kill a suppliant there the law forbids.

CREUSA
But by the law I perish.

LEADER
If their hands
Had seized thee.

CREUSA
Dreadful contest, with drawn swords
They hastily advance.

LEADER
Now take thy seat
At the altar: shouldst thou die ev'n there, thy blood
Will call the vengeance of the god on those
That spilt it: but our fortune we must bear.
(*She takes refuge at the altar as* ION, *guards, and Delphians enter.*)

ION
Bull-visaged sire Cephisus, what a viper
Hast thou produced? a dragon from her eyes
Glaring pernicious flame. Each daring deed
Is hers: less venomous the Gorgon's blood,
With which she purposed to have poison'd me.
Seize her, that the Parnassian rocks may tease
Those nice-adjusted ringlets of her hair,
As down the craggy precipice she bounds.
Here my good genius saved me, e'er I came
To Athens, there beneath my stepdame's wiles
To fall; amid my friends thy fell intents
Have I unravell'd, what a pest to me,
Thy hate how deadly: had thy toils inclosed me
In thine own house, thou wouldst at once have sent me
With complete ruin to the shades below.
But nor the altar nor Apollo's shrine
Shall save thee. Pity, might her voice be heard,
Would rather plead for me and for my mother,
She absent, yet the name remains with me.

Behold that sorceress; with what art she wove
Wile after wile; the altar of the god
Impress'd her not with awe, as if secure.
No vengeance waited her unhallow'd deeds.

CREUSA

I charge thee, kill me not, in my own right,
And in the god's, whose suppliant here I stand.

ION

What right hast thou to plead Apollo's name?

CREUSA

My person hallow'd to the god I offer.

ION

Yet wouldst thou poison one that is the god's.

CREUSA

Thou wast no more Apollo's, but thy father's.

ION

I have been, of a father's wealth I speak.

CREUSA

And now I am: thou hast that claim no more.

ION

But thou art impious: pious were my deeds.

CREUSA

As hostile to my house, I would have kill'd thee.

ION

Did I against thy country march in arms?

CREUSA

And more; thou wouldst have fired Erechtheus' house.

ION

What torch, what brands, what flames had I prepared?

CREUSA

There wouldst thou fix, seizing my right by force.

ION

The land which he possess'd, my father gave me.

CREUSA
What claim hath there the race of Aeolus?

ION
He was its guardian, not with words but arms.

CREUSA
Its soldier then; an inmate, not its lord.

ION
Wouldst thou, through fear of what might happen, kill me?

CREUSA
Lest death should be my portion, if not thine.

ION
Childless thou enviest that my father found me.

CREUSA
And wilt thou make a childless house thy spoil?

ION
Devolves my father then no share to me?

CREUSA
His shield, his spear; be those thine heritage.

ION
Come from the altar, quit that hallow'd seat.

CREUSA
Instruct thy mother, whosoe'er she be.

ION
Shalt thou unpunish'd meditate my death?

CREUSA
Within this shrine if thou wilt murder me.

ION
What pleasure mid these sacred wreaths to die?

CREUSA
We shall grieve one, by whom we have been grieved.

ION
Strange, that the god should give these laws to men,
Bearing no stamp of honour, nor design'd

With provident thought: it is not meet to place
The unrighteous at his altars; worthier far
To be chased thence; nor decent that the vile
Should with their touch pollute the gods: the good,
Oppress'd with wrongs, should at those hallow'd seats
Seek refuge: ill beseems it that the unjust
And just alike should seek protection there.
(*As* ION *and his followers are about to tear* CREUSA *from the altar, the* PRIESTESS *of Apollo enters from the temple.*)

PRIESTESS

Forbear, my son, leaving the oracular seat,
I pass this pale, the priestess of the god,
The guardian of the tripod's ancient law,
Call'd to this charge from all the Delphian dames.

ION

Hail, my loved mother, dear, though not my parent.

PRIESTESS

Yet let me have the name, 'tis grateful to me.

ION

Hast thou yet heard their wily trains to kill me?

PRIESTESS

I have; but void of mercy thou dost wrong.

ION

Should I not ruin those that sought my life?

PRIESTESS

Stepdames to former sons are always hostile.

ION

And I to stepdames ill intreated thus.

PRIESTESS

Be not, this shrine now leaving for thy country.

ION

How, then, by thy monition should I act?

PRIESTESS

Go with good omens, pure to Athens go.

ION
All must be pure that kill their enemies.

PRIESTESS
So do not thou: attentive mark my words.

ION
Speak: from good will whate'er thou say'st must flow.

PRIESTESS
Seest thou the vase I hold beneath mine arm?

ION
I see an ancient ark entwined with wreaths.

PRIESTESS
In this long since an infant I received thee.

ION
What say'st thou? New is thy discourse and strange.

PRIESTESS
In silence have I kept them: now I show them.

ION
And why conceal'd, as long since thou received'st me?

PRIESTESS
The god would have thee in his shrine a servant.

ION
Is that no more his will? How shall I know it?

PRIESTESS
Thy father shown, he sends thee from this land.

ION
Hast thou preserved these things by charge, or how?

PRIESTESS
It was the god that so disposed my thought.

ION
With what design? Speak, finish thy discourse.

PRIESTESS
Ev'n to this hour to keep what then I found.

ION
What gain imports this to me, or what loss?

PRIESTESS
There didst thou lie wrapp'd in thy infant vests.

ION
Thou hast produced whence I may find my mother.

PRIESTESS
Since now the god so wills, but not before.

ION
This is a day of bless'd discoveries.

PRIESTESS
Now take them: o'er all Asia, and the bounds
Of Europe hold thy progress: thou shalt know
These tokens. To do pleasure to the god,
I nurtured thee, my son; now to thy hand
Restore what was his will I should receive
Unbidden, and preserve: for what intent
It was his will, I have not power to say.
That I had these, or where they were conceal'd,
No mortal knew. And now farewell: the love
I bear thee equals what a parent feels.
Let thy inquiries where they ought begin;
First, if some Delphian virgin gave thee birth,
And in this shrine exposed thee; next, if one
Of Greece. From me, and from the god, who feels
An interest in thy fortune, thou hast all.
(*She goes into the temple after giving* ION *the ark.*)

ION
Ah me! the moist tear trickles from mine eye,
When I reflect that she who gave me birth,
By stealth espoused, may with like secrecy
Have sold me, to my infant lips her breast
Denied: but in the temple of the god
Without a name, a servile life I led.
All from the god was gracious, but from fortune
Harsh; for the time when in a mother's arms
I in her fondness should have known some joy
Of life, from that sweet care was I estranged,
A mother's nurture: nor less wretched she,

Thus forced to lose the pleasure in her son.
But I will take this vase, and to the god
Bear it, a hallow'd offering; that from thence
I may find nothing which I would not find.
Should she, that gave me being, chance to be
A slave, to find her were a greater ill,
Than to rest silent in this ignorance.
O Phoebus, in thy temple hang I this.
What am I doing? War I not against
The pleasure of the god, who saved for me
These pledges of my mother? I must dare,
And open these: my fate cannot be shunn'd.
(*He opens the ark.*)
Ye sacred garlands, what have you so long
Conceal'd: ye bands, that keep these precious relics?
Behold the cover of this circular vase;
Its freshness knows no change, as if a god
So will'd; this osier-woven ark yet keeps
Its soundness undecay'd; yet many a year,
Since it contain'd this treasured charge, has pass'd.

CREUSA

What an unhoped-for sight do I behold!

ION

I thought thou long hadst known to keep thee silent.

CREUSA

Silence is mine no more; instruct not me;
For I behold the ark, wherein of old
I laid thee, O my son, an infant babe;
And in the caves of Cecrops, with the rocks
Of Macrai roof'd, exposed thee: I will quit
This altar, though I run on certain death.

ION

Seize her; for by the impulse of the god
She leaves the sculptured altar: bind her hands.

CREUSA

Instantly kill me, so that I embrace
This vase, and thee, and these thy conceal'd pledges.

ION

Is not this strange? I take thee at thy word.

CREUSA
Not strange: a friend thou by thy friends art found.

ION
Thy friend! Yet wouldst thou kill me secretly.

CREUSA
My son: if that to parents is most dear.

ION
Forbear thy wiles; I shall refute them well.

CREUSA
Might I but to come to what I wish, my son!

ION
Is this vase empty, or contains it aught?

CREUSA
Thy infant vests, in which I once exposed thee.

ION
And wilt thou name them to me, ere thou see them?

CREUSA
If I recount them not, be death my meed.

ION
Speak then: thy confidence hath something strange.

CREUSA
A tissue, look, which when a child I wrought.

ION
What is it? Various are the works of virgins.

CREUSA
A slight, unfinish'd essay of the loom.

ION
What figure wrought? Thou shalt not take me thus.

CREUSA
A Gorgon central in the warp enwoven—

ION
What fortune haunts me, O supreme of gods!

CREUSA
And like an aegis edged with serpents round.

ION
Such is the woof, and such the vest I find.

CREUSA
Thou old embroidery of my virgin hands!

ION
Is there aught else besides this happy proof?

CREUSA
Two dragons, an old work, their jaws of gold.

ION
The gift of Pallas, who thus nurtures children?

CREUSA
Emblems of Erichthonius of old times.

ION
Why? for what use? Explain these works of gold.

CREUSA
For ornaments to grace the infant's neck.

ION
See, here they are; the third I wish to know.

CREUSA
A branch of olive then I wreathed around thee,
Pluck'd from that tree which from Minerva's rock
First sprung; if it be there, it still retains
Its verdure: for the foliage of that olive,
Fresh in immortal beauty, never fades.

ION
O my dear mother! I with joy behold thee.
With transport 'gainst thy cheek my cheek recline.
(*They embrace.*)

CREUSA
My son, my son, far dearer to thy mother
Than yon bright orb (the god will pardon me),
Do I then hold thee in my arms, thus found
Beyond my hopes, when in the realms below,
I thought thy habitation 'mong the dead?

ION

O my dear mother, in thy arms I seem
As one that had been dead to life return'd.

CREUSA

Ye wide-expanded rays of heavenly light,
What notes, what high-raised strains shall tell my joy?
This pleasure whence, this unexpected transport?

ION

There was no blessing farther from my thoughts
Than this, my mother, to be found thy son.

CREUSA

I tremble yet.

ION

And hast thou yet a fear,
Holding me, not to hold me?

CREUSA

Such fond hopes
Long time have I renounced. Thou hallow'd matron,
From whom didst thou receive my infant child?
What bless'd hand brought him to Apollo's shrine?

ION

It was the god's appointment: may our life
To come be happy, as the past was wretched.

CREUSA

Not without tears, my son, wast thou brought forth;
Nor without anguish did my hands resign thee.
Now breathing on thy cheek I feel a joy
Transporting me with heartfelt ecstasies.

ION

The words expressive of thy joys speak mine.

CREUSA

Childless no more, no more alone, my house
Now shines with festive joy; my realms now own
A lord; Erechtheus blooms again; no more
His high-traced lineage sees night darkening round,
But glories in the sun's refulgent beams.

ION

Now let my father, since he's present here,
Be partner of the joy which I have given you.

CREUSA

What says my son?

ION

Such, such as I am proved.

CREUSA

What mean thy words? Far other is thy birth.

ION

Ah me! thy virgin bed produced me base.

CREUSA

Nor bridal torch, my son, nor bridal dance
Had graced my nuptial rites, when thou wast born.

ION

Then I'm a wretch, a base-born wretch: say whence.

CREUSA

Be witness, thou by whom the Gorgon died,—

ION

What means this adjuration?

CREUSA

Who hast fix'd
High o'er my cave thy seat amid the rocks
With olive clothed.

ION

Abstruse thy words, and dark.

CREUSA

Where on the cliffs the nightingale attunes
Her songs, Apollo—

ION

Why Apollo named?

CREUSA

Led me in secret to his bed.

ION

Speak on;
Thy words import some glorious fortune to me.

CREUSA

Thee in the tenth revolving month, my son,
A secret pang to Phoebus did I bear.

ION

Thy words, if true, are grateful to my soul.

CREUSA

These swathing bands, thy mother's virgin work,
Wove by my flying shuttle, round thy body
I roll'd; but from thy lips my breast withheld,
A mother's nouriture, nor bathed thy hands
In cleansing lavers; but to death exposed thee,
Laid in the dreary cave, to birds of prey
A feast, rent piecemeal by their ravenous beaks.

ION

Cruel, my mother, was thy deed.

CREUSA

By fear
Constrain'd, my son, I cast thy life away;
Unwillingly I left thee there to die.

ION

And from my hands unholy were thy death.

CREUSA

Dreadful was then my fortune, dreadful here,
Whirl'd by the eddying blast from misery there
To misery here, and back again to joy:
Her boisterous winds are changed; may she remain
In this repose: enough of ills are past:
After the storm soft breathes a favouring gale.

LEADER

From this example, mid the greatest ills
Never let mortal man abandon hope.

ION

O thou, that hast to thousands wrought a change
Of state ere this, involving them in ills,

And raising them to happiness again;
Fortune, to what a point have I been carried,
Ready to kill my mother, horrid thought!
But in the sun's bright course each day affords
Instruction. Thee, my mother, have I found,
In that discovery bless'd; nor hath my birth
Aught I can blame: yet one thing would I say
To thee alone:—walk this way: to thine ear
In secret would I whisper this, and throw
The veil of darkness o'er each circumstance.
Take heed, my mother, lest thy maiden fault
Seeks in these secret nuptials to conceal
Its fault, then charges on the god the deed;
And, fearing my reproach, to Phoebus gives
A son, to Phoebus whom thou didst not bear.

CREUSA

By her, who 'gainst the giants in her car
Fought by the side of Jove, victorious Pallas,
No one of mortal race is father to thee,
But he who brought thee up, the royal Phoebus.

ION

Why give his son then to another father?
Why say that I was born the son of Xuthus?

CREUSA

Not born the son of Xuthus; but he gives thee,
Born from himself (as friend to friend may give
His son), and heir adopted to his house.

ION

True is the god, his tripod else were vain.
Not without cause then is my mind perplex'd.

CREUSA

Hear what my thoughts suggest: to work thee good
Apollo placed thee in a noble house.
Acknowledged his, the rich inheritance
Could not be thine, nor could a father's name;
For I conceal'd my nuptials, and had plann'd
To kill thee secretly: for this the god
In kindness gives thee to another father.

ION

My mind is prompt to entertain such thoughts;
But, entering at his shrine will I inquire
If from a mortal father I am sprung,
Or from Apollo.—Ha! what may this be?
What god above the hallow'd dome unveils
His radiant face that shines another sun?
Haste, let us fly: the presence of the gods
'Tis not for mortals to behold, and live.

(MINERVA *appears from above.*)

MINERVA [4]

Fly not; in me no enemy you fly;
At Athens friendly to you, and no less
Here. From that land I come, so named from me,
By Phoebus sent with speed: unmeet he deems it
To show himself before you, lest with blame
The past be mention'd; this he gave in charge,
To tell thee that she bore thee, and to him,
Phoebus thy father; he to whom he gave thee,
Not as to the author of thy being gives thee,
But to the inheritance of a noble house.
This declaration made, lest thou shouldst die,
Kill'd by thy mother's wily trains, or she
By thee, these means to save you he devised.
These things in silence long conceal'd, at Athens
The royal Phoebus would have made it known
That thou art sprung from her, thy father he:
But to discharge my office, and unfold
The oracle of the god, for which you yoked
Your chariots, hear: Creusa, take thy son,
Go to the land of Cecrops: let him mount
The royal throne; for, from Erechtheus sprung,
That honour is his due, the sovereignty
Over my country: through the states of Greece
Wide his renown shall spread; for from his root
Four sons shall spring, that to the land, the tribes,
The dwellers on my rock, shall give their names.
Geleon the first, Hopletes, Argades,
And from my aegis named Aegicores:
Their sons in fate's appointed time shall fix
Their seats along the coast, or in the isles
Girt by the Aegean sea, and to my land

Give strength; extending thence the opposite plains
Of either continent shall make their own,
Europe and Asia, and shall boast their name
Ionians, from the honour'd Ion call'd.
To thee by Xuthus shall a son be born,
Dorus, from whom the Dorian state shall rise
To high renown; in the Pelopian land,
Another near the Rhian cliffs, along
The sea-wash'd coast, his potent monarchy
Shall stretch, Achaeus; and his subject realms
Shall glory in their chief's illustrious name.
Well hath Apollo quitted him in all:
First, without pain he caused thee bear a son.
That from thy friends thou mightst conceal his birth;
After the birth, soon as his infant limbs
Thy hands had clothed, to Mercury he gave
The charge to take the babe, and in his arms
Convey him hither; here with tenderness
He nurtured him, nor suffer'd him to perish.
Guard now the secret that he is thy son,
That his opinion Xuthus may enjoy
Delighted: thou too hast thy blessings, lady.
And now, farewell: from this relief from ills
A prosperous fortune I to both announce.

ION

O Pallas, daughter of all-powerful Jove!
Not with distrust shall we receive thy words:
I am convinced that Phoebus is my father,
My mother she, not unassured before.

CREUSA

Hear me too, now: Phoebus I praise, before
Unpraised; my son he now restores, of whom
Till now I deem'd him heedless. Now these gates
Are beauteous to mine eyes; his oracles
Now grateful to my soul, unpleasant late.
With rapture on these sounding rings my hands
Now hang; with rapture I address the gates.

MINERVA

This I approve, thy former wayward thoughts
Resign'd, with honour that thou name the god.
Slow are the gifts of Heaven, but found at length
Not void of power.

CREUSA
My son, let us now go
To Athens.

MINERVA
Go; myself will follow you.

CREUSA
A noble guard, and friendly to the state.

MINERVA
But seat him high on thy paternal throne.

CREUSA
A rich possession, and I glory in him.
(MINERVA *disappears.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)
Son of Latona and all-powerful Jove,
Apollo, hail! Though fortune's blackest storms
Rage on his house, the man whose pious soul
Reveres the gods, assumes a confidence,
And justly: for the good at length obtain
The meed of virtue; but the unholy wretch
(Such is his nature) never can be happy.

THE translation of R. Potter, done in the eighteenth century, preserves certain orthographical conventions of that time. Potter likewise uses the Roman forms for various proper names. For example, Hermes and Athena appear as Mercury and Minerva.

1. In connection with this scene, cf. note 1 on Aeschylus, *The Seven Against Thebes.*

2. This soliloquy of Ion perhaps may be evidence for the conclusion that the play has a serious religious orientation.

3. The following description of the tapestry calls to mind the account of the decorations on the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad,* Book XVIII.

4. Attention should be called to the elements of aetiology which Euripides has characteristically introduced into this speech.

THE COMPLETE GREEK DRAMA

THE
Complete Greek Drama

ALL THE EXTANT TRAGEDIES OF AESCHYLUS, SOPHOCLES AND EURIPIDES, AND THE COMEDIES OF ARISTOPHANES AND MENANDER, IN A VARIETY OF TRANSLATIONS

EDITED BY

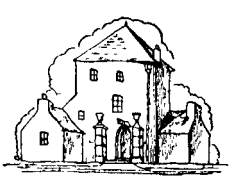
WHITNEY J. OATES

AND

EUGENE O'NEILL, JR.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME TWO



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THE PLAYS OF EURIPIDES (Continued)

XII
HELEN

Characters in the Play

Helen, *wife of* Menelaus
Teucer, *a Greek warrior, who fought at Troy*
Chorus of Captive Greek Women, *attending* Helen
Menelaus, *King of Sparta*
Portress *of* Theoclymenus
First Messenger
Second Messenger
Theonoe, *sister of* Theoclymenus
Theoclymenus, *King of Egypt*
Servant *of* Theoclymenus
The Dioscuri
Guards, attendants, etc.

INTRODUCTION

THE *Helen,* which can be dated with some accuracy in 412 B.C., has been interpreted variously by scholars and critics. Some have taken it as a serious play, while others, notably A. W. Verrall in his *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides,* have seen in it a piece which Euripides composed as a parody of his own works. Two aspects of the *Helen* largely account for the disagreement. In the first place it is strikingly similar in many respects to the *Iphigenia in Tauris,* and secondly, it presents a version of the legend of Helen which departs from the more generally received tradition.

Helen seems to have been worshipped as a heroine in several communities of the ancient world in the earlier historical epoch. Her position as a demi-goddess perhaps accounts for the fact that a variant story of her Trojan adventures came into existence. The usual account made Helen guilty in large measure for all the woe and misery of the Trojan War. It is natural therefore to suppose that her devotees would endeavour to evolve some myth which would relieve her of the blame which tradition had placed upon her. Hence we are not surprised to find that there was a story current which held that Helen never went to Troy. Whether ultimately responsible for the theory or not, Stesichorus, a Greek poet of the early sixth century B.C., developed this theme in his verse in such a way as to attract wide attention. In fact, a story about Stesichorus grew up in this connection. He is said to have composed a poem on Helen in which he treated her with traditional animus, whereupon immediately he was struck blind. Rightly understanding the reason for his blindness, so the story goes, he hastened to write his famous *Palinode* or *Recantation,* in which he maintained that not Helen, but only a phantom went with Paris to Troy. The Greeks and Trojans in their delusion for ten years fought for the possession of this wraith. Meanwhile the real Helen had been transported by the gods to Egypt, where she had remained under the protection of Proteus, then King of Egypt. Menelaus at last came to Egypt and the couple were reunited.[1] Stesichorus retracted his disparagement of Helen in these terms, and his eyesight was forthwith restored.

[1] Herodotus in his *History,* Book II, 112–120, records a version of the story of Helen in Egypt which was told him by the Egyptian priests

Euripides in his play relies heavily upon the Stesichorean version of the legend. Helen herself speaks at the beginning of the prologue and relates how Paris judged the beauty of the three goddesses, Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena, and how he gave the award to Aphrodite on condition that he himself might have Helen for his bride. At this point the untraditional features are introduced into the story, for Helen says that Hera, in anger at Paris' decision, contrived that he should never enjoy Aphrodite's bride. Hera therefore fashioned a phantom Helen whom Paris carried off to Troy, and commanded that the real Helen be conveyed to Egypt. We are then informed that all went well in Egypt, so long as Helen's protector, Proteus, was alive, but that now, after his death, his son and heir, Theoclymenus, desires to marry her. Euripides completes the prologue by introducing Teucer as a protatic character, from whom Helen learns all that has taken place at Troy during the war that has recently ended.

Out of this dramatic situation Euripides develops a play of romantic adventure in which he seems clearly to be reinvoking the dramatic formula of the *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Here again the hero and heroine find themselves in a predicament out of which they work their way by the use of clever resourcefulness. Such a play could not fail to have an appeal to the Greek audience, not only because it was in itself exciting, but also because it exhibited this quality of resourcefulness in operation, a phenomenon which always captured the attention of the Greek, as is witnessed, for example, by the high position as a popular hero consistently held by the Homeric Odysseus. If the poet's purpose was to present an exciting, romantic melodrama and to employ relatively novel subject-matter, any criticism must be regarded as captious which insists on judging the play according to the criteria applicable only to true tragedy. For example, the rôle of the prophetess, Theonoe, would be unconvincing were the play truly tragic, but in the *Helen* as it now stands, it seems to perform a perfectly legitimate function in a melodramatic plot. If the play be taken for what it patently is, there will arise no need to look for some tragic significance which is not there, and furthermore there will be no occasion to adopt the untenable theory that Euripides is engaged in parody of himself.

HELEN

(SCENE:—*Before the palace of* THEOCLYMENUS *in Egypt. It is near the mouth of the Nile. The tomb of Proteus, the father of* THEOCLYMENUS, *is visible.* HELEN *is discovered alone before the tomb.*)

HELEN

Lo! THESE are the fair virgin streams of Nile, the river that waters Egypt's tilth, fed by pure melting snow instead of rain from heaven. Proteus during his life-time was king of this land, dwelling in the isle of Pharos, and ruling o'er Egypt; and he took to wife one of the daughters of the sea, Psamathe, after she left the embraces of Aeacus. Two children she bare in this his palace, a son Theoclymenus, who hath passed his life in duteous service to the gods, and likewise a noble daughter, her mother's pride, called Eido in her infancy, but when she reached her youthful prime, the age for wedded joys, renamed Theonoe; for well she knew whate'er the gods design, both present and to come, for she had won this guerdon from her grandsire Nereus. Nor is my fatherland unknown to fame, e'en Sparta, or my sire Tyndareus; for a legend tells how Zeus winged his way to my mother Leda's breast, in the semblance of a bird, even a swan, and thus as he fled from an eagle's pursuit, achieved by guile his amorous purpose, if this tale be true. My name is Helen, and I will now recount the sorrows I have suffered. To a hollow vale on Ida came three goddesses to Paris, for beauty's prize contending, Hera and Cypris, and the virgin child of Zeus, eager to secure his verdict on their loveliness. Now Cypris held out my beauty,—if aught so wretched deserves that name,—as a bride before the eyes of Paris, saying he should marry me; and so she won the day; wherefore the shepherd of Ida left his steading, and came to Sparta, thinking to win me for his bride. But Hera, indignant at not defeating the goddesses, brought to naught my marriage with Paris, and gave to Priam's princely son not Helen, but a phantom endowed with life, that she made in my image out of the breath of heaven; and Paris thought that I was his, although I never was,—an idle fancy! Moreover, the counsels of Zeus added further troubles unto these; for

upon the land of Hellas and the hapless Phrygians he brought a war, that he might lighten mother-earth of her myriad hosts of men, and to the bravest of the sons of Hellas bring renown. So I was set up as a prize for all the chivalry of Hellas, to test the might of Phrygia, yet not I, but my name alone; for Hermes caught me up in the embracing air, and veiled me in a cloud; for Zeus was not unmindful of me; and he set me down here in the house of Proteus, judging him to be the most virtuous of all mankind; that so I might preserve my marriage with Menelaus free from taint. Here then I abide, while my hapless lord has gathered an army, and is setting out for the towers of Ilium to track and recover me. And there by Scamander's streams hath many a life breathed out its last, and all for me; and I, that have endured all this, am accursed, and seem to have embroiled all Hellas in a mighty war by proving a traitress to my husband. Why, then, do I prolong my life? Because I heard Hermes declare, that I should yet again make my home on Sparta's glorious soil, with my lord,—for Hermes knew I never went to Ilium,—that so I might never submit to any other's wooing. Now as long as Proteus gazed upon yon glorious sun, I was safe from marriage; but when o'er him the dark grave closed, the dead man's son was eager for my hand. But I, from regard to my former husband, am throwing myself down in suppliant wise before this tomb of Proteus, praying him to guard my husband's honour, that, though through Hellas I bear a name dishonoured, at least my body here may not incur disgrace.

(TEUCER *enters.*)

TEUCER

Who is lord and master of this fenced palace? The house is one I may compare to the halls of Plutus, with its royal bulwarks and towering buildings. Ha! great gods! what sight is here? I see the counterfeit of that fell murderous dame, who ruined me and all the Achaeans. May Heaven show its loathing for thee, so much dost thou resemble Helen! Were I not standing on a foreign soil, with this well-aimed shaft had I worked thy death, thy reward for resembling the daughter of Zeus.

HELEN

Oh! why, poor man, whoe'er thou art, dost thou turn from me, loathing me for those troubles Helen caused?

TEUCER

I was wrong; I yielded to my anger more than I ought; my reason was, the hate all Hellas bears to that daughter of Zeus. Pardon me, lady, for the words I uttered.

HELEN

Who art thou? whence comest thou to visit this land?

TEUCER

One of those hapless Achaeans am I, lady.

HELEN

No wonder then that thou dost hate Helen. But say, who art thou? Whence comest? By what name am I to call thee?

TEUCER

My name is Teucer; my sire was Telamon, and Salamis is the land that nurtured me.

HELEN

Then why art thou visiting these meadows by the Nile?

TEUCER

A wanderer I, an exile from my native land.

HELEN

Thine must be a piteous lot; who from thy country drives thee out?

TEUCER

My father Telamon. Couldst find a nearer and a dearer?

HELEN

But why? This case is surely fraught with woe.

TEUCER

The death of Ajax my brother at Troy was my ruin.

HELEN

How so? surely 'twas not thy sword that stole his life away?

TEUCER

He threw himself on his own blade and died.

HELEN

Was he mad? for who with sense endowed would bring himself to this?

TEUCER

Dost thou know aught of Achilles, son of Peleus?

HELEN

He came, so I have heard, to woo Helen once.

TEUCER

When he died, he left his arms for his comrades to contest.

HELEN

Well, if he did, what harm herein to Ajax?

TEUCER

When another won these arms, to himself he put an end.

HELEN

Art thou then a sufferer by woes that he inflicted?

TEUCER

Yes, because I did not join him in his death.

HELEN

So thou camest, sir stranger, to Ilium's famous town?

TEUCER

Aye, and, after helping to sack it, myself did learn what ruin meant.

HELEN

Is Troy already fired and utterly by flames consumed?

TEUCER

Yea, so that not so much as one vestige of her walls is now to be seen.

HELEN

Woe is thee, poor Helen! thou art the cause of Phrygia's ruin.

TEUCER

And of Achaea's too. Ah! 'tis a tale of grievous misery!

HELEN

How long is it since the city was sacked?

TEUCER

Nigh seven fruitful seasons have come and gone.

HELEN

And how much longer did ye abide in Troy?

TEUCER

Many a weary month, till through ten full years the moon had held her course.

HELEN

And did ye capture that Spartan dame?

TEUCER

Menelaus caught her by the hair, and was for dragging her away.

HELEN

Didst thou thyself behold that unhappy one? or art thou speaking from hearsay?

TEUCER

As plain as I now see thee, I then saw her.

HELEN

Consider whether ye were but indulging an idle fancy sent by heaven.

TEUCER

Bethink thee of some other topic; no more of her!

HELEN

Are you so sure this fancy was reliable?

TEUCER

With these eyes I saw her face to face, if so be I see thee now.

HELEN

Hath Menelaus reached his home by this time with his wife?

TEUCER

No, he is neither in Argos, nor yet by the streams of Eurotas.

HELEN

Ah me! here is evil news for those to whom thou art telling it.

TEUCER

'Tis said he disappeared with his wife.

HELEN

Did not all the Argives make the passage together?

TEUCER

Yes; but a tempest scattered them in every direction.

HELEN

In what quarter of the broad ocean?

TEUCER

They were crossing the Aegean in mid channel.

HELEN

And after that, doth no man know of Menelaus' arrival?

TEUCER

No, none; but through Hellas is he reported to be dead.

HELEN

Then am I lost. Is the daughter of Thestius alive?

TEUCER

Dost speak of Leda? She is dead; aye, dead and gone.

HELEN

Was it Helen's shame that caused her death?

TEUCER

Aye, 'tis said she tied the noose about her noble neck.

HELEN

Are the sons of Tyndareus still alive or not?

TEUCER

Dead, and yet alive: 'tis a double story.

HELEN

Which is the more credible report? Woe is me for my sorrows!

TEUCER

Men say that they are gods in the likeness of stars.

HELEN

That is happy news; but what is the other rumour?

TEUCER

That they by self-inflicted wounds gave up the ghost because of their sister's shame. But enough of such talk! I have no wish to multiply my griefs. The reason of my coming to this royal palace was a wish to see that famous prophetess Theonoe. Do thou the means afford, that I from her may obtain an oracle how I shall steer a favourable course to the sea-girt shores of Cyprus; for there Apollo hath declared my home shall be, giving to it the name of Salamis, my island home, in honour of that fatherland across the main.

HELEN

That shall the voyage itself explain, sir stranger; but do thou leave these shores and fly, ere the son of Proteus, the ruler of this land, catch sight of thee. Now is he away with his trusty hounds tracking his savage quarry to the death; for every stranger that he catcheth from the land of Hellas doth he slay. His reason never ask to know; my lips are sealed; for what could word of mine avail thee?

TEUCER

Lady, thy words are fair. Heaven grant thee a fair requital for this kindness! For though in form thou dost resemble Helen, thy soul is not like hers, nay, very different. Perdition seize her! May she never reach the streams of Eurotas! But thine be joy for evermore, lady!

(TEUCER *departs. The* CHORUS OF CAPTIVE GREEK WOMEN *enter. They sing responsively with* HELEN.)

HELEN

Ah me! what piteous dirge shall I strive to utter, now that I am beginning my strain of bitter lamentation? What Muse shall I approach with tears or songs of death or woe? Ah me! ye Sirens, Earth's virgin daughters, wingèd maids, come, oh! come to aid my mourning, bringing with you the Libyan flute or pipe, to waft to Persephone's ear a tearful plaint, the echo of my sorrow, with grief for grief, and mournful chant for chant, with songs of death and doom to match my lamentation, that in return she may receive from me, besides my tears, dirges for the departed dead beneath her gloomy roof!

CHORUS

Beside the deep-blue water I chanced to be hanging purple robes along the tendrils green and on the sprouting reeds, to dry them in the sun-god's golden blaze, when lo! I heard a sound of woe, a mournful wail, the voice of one crying aloud in her anguish; yea, such a cry of woe as Naiad nymph might send ringing o'er the hills, while to her cry the depths of rocky grots re-echo her screams at the violence of Pan.

HELEN

Woe! woe! ye maids of Hellas, booty of barbarian sailors! one hath come, an Achaean mariner, bringing fresh tears to me, the news of Ilium's overthrow, how that it is left to the mercy of the foeman's flame, and all for me the murderess, or for my name with sorrow fraught. While for anguish at my deed of shame, hath Leda sought her death by hanging; and on the deep, to weary wandering doomed my lord hath met his end; and Castor and his brother, twin glory of their native land, are vanished from men's sight, leaving the plains that shook to their galloping steeds, and the course beside reed-fringed Eurotas, where those youthful athletes strove.

CHORUS

Ah, misery! Alas! for thy grievous destiny! Woe for thy sad lot, lady! Ah! 'twas a day of sorrow meted out for thee when Zeus came glancing through the sky on snowy pinions like a swan and won thy

mother's heart. What evil is not thine? Is there a grief in life that thou hast not endured? Thy mother is dead; the two dear sons of Zeus have perished miserably, and thou art severed from thy country's sight, while through the towns of men a rumour runs, consigning thee, my honoured mistress, to a barbarian's bed; and 'mid the ocean waves thy lord hath lost his life, and never, never more shalt thou fill with joy thy father's halls or Athena's temple of the "Brazen House."

HELEN

Ah! who was that Phrygian, who was he, that felled that pine with sorrow fraught for Ilium, and for those that came from Hellas? Hence it was that Priam's son his cursed barque did build, and sped by barbarian oars sailed unto my home, in quest of beauty, woman's curse, to win me for his bride; and with him sailed the treacherous queen of Love, on slaughter bent, with death alike for Priam's sons, and Danai too. Ah me! for my hard lot! Next, Hera, stately bride of Zeus, seated on her golden throne, sent the son of Maia, swift of foot, who caught me up as I was gathering fresh rose-buds in the folds of my robe, that I might go to the "Brazen House," and bore me through the air to this loveless land, making me an object of unhappy strife 'twixt Hellas and the race of Priam. And my name is but a sound without reality beside the streams of Simois.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Well I know thou hast a bitter lot to bear; still 'tis best to bear as lightly as we may the ills that life is heir to.

HELEN

Good friends, to what a fate am I united? Did not my mother bear me to be a monster to the world? For no woman, Hellene or barbarian, gives birth to babes in eggs inclosed, as they say Leda bare me to Zeus. My life and all I do is one miracle, partly owing to Hera, and partly is my beauty to blame. Would God I could rub my beauty out like a picture, and assume hereafter in its stead a form less comely, and oh! that Hellas had forgotten the evil fate that now I bear, and were now remembering my career of honour as surely as they do my deeds of shame. Now, if a man doth turn his eyes to a single phase of fortune, and meets ill-usage at heaven's hands, 'tis hard no doubt; but still it can be borne; but I in countless troubles am involved. First, although I never sinned, my good name is gone. And this is a grief beyond the reality, if a man incurs blame for sins that are not his. Next, have the gods removed me from my native land, to dwell with men of barbarous ways, and reft of every friend, I am become a slave though free by birth; for amongst barbarians all are slaves

but one. And the last anchor that held my fortunes, the hope that my husband would return one day, and rid me of my woes, is now no more, lost since the day he died. My mother too is dead, and I am called her murderess, unjustly it is true, but still that injustice is mine to bear; and she that was the glory of my house, my darling child, is growing old and grey, unwedded still; and those twin brethren, called the sons of Zeus, are now no more. But 'tis fortune, not my own doing, that hath crushed me with sorrow and slain me. And this is the last evil of all; if ever I come to my native land, they will shut me up in prison, thinking me that Helen of Ilium, in quest of whom Menelaus came thither. Were my husband still alive, we might have recognized each other, by having recourse to tokens which ourselves alone would know. But now this may not be, nor is there any chance of his escape. Why then do I prolong my life? What fortune have I still in store? Shall I choose marriage as an alternative of evils, and dwell with a barbarian lord, seated at his sumptuous board? No! when a husband she loathes is mated with a woman, even life is loathly to her. Best for her to die; but how shall I die a noble death? The dangling noose is an uncomely end; even slaves consider it disgrace; to stab oneself hath something fair and noble in it; 'tis a small thing that moment of ridding the flesh of life. Yes, it must be; I am plunged so deep in misery; for that beauty, which to other women is a boon, to me hath been a very bane.

LEADER

Helen, never believe that the stranger, whoe'er he was that came, has spoken naught but truth.

HELEN

Yet he said so clearly that my lord was dead.

LEADER

There is much that falsehood seems to make quite clear.

HELEN

The word of truth hath a very different sound to falsehood.

LEADER

Thou art inclined to misfortune, rather than to luck

HELEN

Fear girds me with terrors as with a garment, and takes me in her train.

LEADER

What friends hast thou within the palace?

HELEN

All are my friends here save him who seeks to wed me.

LEADER

Thy action then is clear; leave thy seat at the tomb.

HELEN

To what words or advice art thou leading up?

LEADER

Go in and question the daughter of the ocean Nereid, who knoweth all things, even Theonoe, whether thy husband is still alive, or whether he hath left the light of day; and when thou knowest for certain, be glad or sorrowful, as fits thy fortune. But before thou hast right knowledge, what shall sorrow avail thee? Nay, hearken to me; leave this tomb and seek the maiden's company, that she may tell thee the truth, for from her shalt thou learn all. If thou abide here in this seat, what prospect hast thou? And I will myself go in with thee, and with thee inquire of the maiden's oracles; for 'tis a woman's bounden duty to share a sister's trouble.

(*The following lines are chanted responsively by* HELEN *and the* CHORUS.)

HELEN

Kind friends, I welcome your advice. Come in, come in, that ye may learn the result of my struggle within the palace .

CHORUS

Thy invitation comes to very willing ears.

HELEN

Woe for this heavy day! Ah me! what mournful tidings shall I hear?

CHORUS

Dear mistress mine, be not a prophetess of sorrow, forestalling lamentation.

HELEN

What is the fate of my poor husband? Doth he still behold the light turning towards the sun-god's chariot and the stars in their courses? Or among the dead, beneath the earth, is he to death consigned?

CHORUS

Of the future take a brighter view, whatever shall betide.

HELEN

On thee I call, and thee adjure, Eurotas green with river-reeds, to tell me if this rumour of my husband's death be true.

CHORUS

What boots this meaningless appeal?

HELEN

About my neck will I fasten the deadly noose from above, or drive the murderous knife with self-aimed thrust deep into my throat to sever it, striving to cut my flesh, a sacrifice to those goddesses three and to that son of Priam, who in days gone by would wake the music of his pipe around his steading.

CHORUS

Oh may sorrow be averted otherwhither, and thou be blest!

HELEN

Woe is thee, unhappy Troy! Thou through deeds not done by thee art ruined, and hast suffered direst woe; for the gift that Cypris gave to me, hath caused a sea of blood to flow, and many an eye to weep, with grief on grief and tear on tear. All this hath Ilium suffered and mothers have lost their children; and virgin sisters of the slain have cut off their tresses by the swollen tide of Phrygian Scamander. And the land of Hellas hath lifted her voice of woe and broken forth in wailing, smiting on her head, and making tender cheeks to stream with gore beneath the rending nail. Ah blest maid Callisto, who long ago in Arcady didst find favour with Zeus, in the semblance of a beast four-footed, how much happier was thy lot than my mother's, for thou hast changed the burden of thy grief and now with savage eye art weeping o'er thy shaggy monster-shape; aye, and hers was a happier lot, whom on a day Artemis drove from her choir, changed to a hind with horns of gold, the fair Titanian maid, daughter of Merops, because of her beauty; but my fair form hath proved the curse of Dardan Troy and doomed Achaea's sons.

(HELEN *and the* CHORUS *go into the palace. After the doors have closed upon them,* MENELAUS *enters. He is alone and clad in rags.*)

MENELAUS

Ah! Pelops, easy victor long ago o'er thy rival Oenomaus in the chariot-race on Pisa's plain, would thou hadst ended thy career amongst the gods that day thou wert beguiled into making a banquet for them, or ever thou hadst begotten my father Atreus, to whom were born by Aerope his

wife, Agamemnon and myself Menelaus, an illustrious pair; and herein I make no idle boast, for 'twas a mighty host, I trow, that I their leader carried o'er the sea to Troy, using no violence to make them follow me, but leading all the chivalry of Hellas by voluntary consent. And some of these must we number 'mid the slain, and some to their joy have 'scaped the sea, bearing to their homes again names long reckoned dead. But I, poor wretch, go wandering o'er grey Ocean's swell a weary space, long as that which saw me sack the towers of Ilium; and for all my longing to reach my country I am not counted worthy of this boon by heaven, but to Libya's desert cheerless roadsteads have I sailed, to each and all of them; and whensoe'er I draw me near my native land, the storm-wind drives me back again, and never yet have favouring breezes filled my sails, to let me reach my fatherland. And now a wretched, shipwrecked mariner, my friends all lost, am I cast up upon this shore; and my ship is shattered in a thousand pieces against the rocks; and its keel was wrested from its cunning fastenings; thereon did I with difficulty escape, most unexpectedly, and Helen also, for her had I rescued from Troy and had with me. But the name of this country and its people I know not; for I blushed to mingle with the crowd to question them, anxious for very shame to hide my misfortunes which reduce me to these sorry rags. For when a man of high degree meets with adversity, he feels the strangeness of his fallen state more keenly than a sufferer of long standing. Dire want is wasting me; for I have neither food, nor raiment to gird myself withal; behold the facts before you to judge from—I am clad in tatters cast up from the ship; while all the robes I once did wear, glorious attire and ornaments, hath the sea swallowed; and in a cavern's deep recesses have I hidden my wife, the cause of all my trouble, and have come hither, after straitly charging the survivors of my friends to watch her. Alone am I come, seeking for those there left some help, if haply I may find it after careful search. So when I saw this palace girt with towering walls and stately gates of some prosperous lord, I drew nigh; for I have hope to obtain somewhat for my sailors from this wealthy house, whereas from houses which have no store, the inmates for all their goodwill could furnish naught. Ho! there, who keeps the gate and will come forth to bear my tale of woe into the house?

(*A* PORTRESS *comes out of the palace in answer to his call.*)

PORTRESS

Who stands before the door? Begone from the house! stand not at the court-yard gate, annoying my masters! otherwise shalt thou die, for thou art a Hellene born, and with them have we no dealings.

MENELAUS

Mother, herein sayest thou rightly on all points. 'Tis well; I will obey, but moderate thy words.

PORTRESS

Away! stranger, my orders are to admit no Hellene to this palace.

MENELAUS

Ha! do not seek to push me hence, or thrust me away by violence.

PORTRESS

Thou dost not heed my words, and therefore hast thyself to blame

MENELAUS

Carry my message to thy master in the palace

PORTRESS

Some one would rue it, methinks, were I to take thy message

MENELAUS

I come as a shipwrecked man and a stranger, whom heaven protects

PORTRESS

Well, get thee to some other house than this.

MENELAUS

Nay, but I will pass into the house, so listen to me.

PORTRESS

Let me tell thee thou art unwelcome, and soon wilt be forcibly ejected.

MENELAUS

Ah me! where are now those famous troops of mine?

PORTRESS

Elsewhere maybe thou wert a mighty man, thou art not here.

MENELAUS

O fortune! I have not deserved such insult.

PORTRESS

Why are thy eyes with tear-drops wet? Why so sad?

MENELAUS

'Tis the contrast with my fortunes erst so blest.

PORTRESS

Hence! then, and give thy friends those tears.

MENELAUS
What land is this? whose is the palace?

PORTRESS
Proteus lives here. It is the land of Egypt.

MENELAUS
Egypt? Woe is me! to think that hither I have sailed!

PORTRESS
Pray, what fault hast thou to find with the race of Nile?

MENELAUS
'Twas no fault I found; my own disasters I lament.

PORTRESS
There be plenty in evil case; thou art not the only one.

MENELAUS
Is the king, of whom thou speakest, here within?

PORTRESS
There is his tomb; his son rules in his stead.

MENELAUS
And where may he be? abroad, or in the house?

PORTRESS
He is not within. To Hellas is he a bitter foe.

MENELAUS
His reason, pray, for this enmity? the results whereof I have experienced.

PORTRESS
Beneath this roof dwells the daughter of Zeus, Helen.

MENELAUS
What mean'st thou? what is it thou hast said? Repeat, I pray, thy words.

PORTRESS
The daughter of Tyndareus is here, who erst in Sparta dwelt.

MENELAUS
Whence came she? What means this business?

PORTRESS

She came from Lacedaemon hither.

MENELAUS

When? Surely I have never been robbed of my wife from the cave!

PORTRESS

Before the Achaeans went to Troy, sir stranger. But get thee hence; for somewhat hath chanced within, whereat the whole palace is in an uproar. Thou comest most unseasonably; and if my master catch thee, death will be thy stranger's gift. This say I, because to Hellas I am well disposed, albeit I gave thee harsh answers for fear of my master.

(*The* PORTRESS *goes back into the palace.*)

MENELAUS

What can I think or say? For after my previous troubles, this is a fresh piece of ill-luck I hear, if, indeed, after recovering my wife from Troy and bringing her hither, and putting her for safety in the cave, I am then to find another woman living here with the same name as my wife. She called her the begotten child of Zeus. Can there be a man that hath the name of Zeus by the banks of Nile? The Zeus of heaven is only one, at any rate. Where is there a Sparta in the world save where Eurotas glides between his reedy banks? The name of Tyndareus is the name of one alone. Is there any land of the same name as Lacedaemon or Troy? I know not what to say; for naturally there are many in the wide world that have the same names, cities and women too; there is nothing, then, to marvel at. Nor yet again will I fly from the alarm a servant raises; for there is none so cruel of heart as to refuse me food when once he hears my name. All have heard of Ilium's burning, and I, that set it ablaze, am famous now throughout the world, I, Menelaus. I therefore wait the master of this house. There are two issues I must watch; if he prove somewhat stern of heart, I will to my wreck and there conceal myself; but if he show any sign of pity, I will ask for help in this my present strait. This is the crowning woe in all my misery, to beg the means of life from other princes, prince though I be myself; still needs must I. Yea, this is no saying of mine, but a word of wisdom, "Naught in might exceedeth dread necessity."

(HELEN *and the* CHORUS *enter from the palace. They do not notice* MENELAUS.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

I have heard the voice of the maiden inspired. Clear is the answer she hath vouchsafed within yon palace, declaring that Menelaus is not yet dead and buried, passed to the land of shades, where darkness

takes the place of light; but on the stormy main is wearing out his life, nor yet hath reached the haven of his country, a wanderer dragging out a piteous existence, reft of every friend, setting foot in every corner of the world, as he voyageth home from Troy.

HELEN

Lo! once again I seek the shelter of this tomb, with Theonoe's sweet tidings in my ears; she that knoweth all things of a truth; for she saith my lord is yet alive and in the light of day, albeit he is roaming to and fro after many a weary voyage, and hither shall he come whenso he reach the limit of his toils, no novice in the wanderer's life. But one thing did she leave unsaid. Is he to escape when he hath come? And I refrained from asking that question clearly, so glad was I when she told me he was safe. For she said that he was somewhere nigh this shore, cast up by shipwreck with a handful of friends. Ah! when shall I see thee come? How welcome will thy advent be! (*She catches sight of* MENELAUS.) Ha! who is this? Am I being snared by some trick of Proteus' impious son? Oh! let me, like a courser at its speed, or a votary of Bacchus, approach the tomb! for there is something wild about this fellow's looks, who is eager to o'ertake me.

MENELAUS

Ho there! thou that with fearful effort seekest to reach the basement of the tomb and the pillars of burnt sacrifice, stay thee. Wherefore art flying? Ah! with what speechless amaze the sight of thee affects me!

HELEN

O friends! I am being ill-treated. This man is keeping me from the tomb, and is eager to take and give me to his master, whose wooing I was seeking to avoid.

MENELAUS

No robber I, or minister of evil.

HELEN

At any rate the garb wherein thou art clad is unseemly.

MENELAUS

Stay thy hasty flight; put fear aside.

HELEN

I do so, now that I have reached this spot.

MENELAUS

Who art thou? whom do I behold in thee, lady?

HELEN

Nay, who art thou? The self-same reason prompts us both.

MENELAUS

I never saw a closer resemblance.

HELEN

Great God! Yea, for to recognize our friends is of God.

MENELAUS

Art thou from Hellas, or a native of this land?

HELEN

From Hellas; but I would learn thy story too.

MENELAUS

Lady, in thee I see a wondrous likeness to Helen.

HELEN

And I in thee to Menelaus; I know not what to say.

MENELAUS

Well, thou hast recognized aright a man of many sorrows.

HELEN

Hail! to thy wife's arms restored at last!

MENELAUS

Wife indeed! Lay not a finger on my robe.

HELEN

The wife that Tyndareus, my father, gave thee.

MENELAUS

O Hecate, giver of light, send thy visions favourably!

HELEN

In me thou beholdest no spectre of the night, attendant on the queen of phantoms.

MENELAUS

Nor yet am I in my single person the husband of two wives.

HELEN

What other woman calls thee lord?

MENELAUS

The inmate of yonder cave, whom I from Troy convey.

HELEN

Thou hast none other wife but me.

MENELAUS

Can it be my mind is wandering, my sight failing?

HELEN

Dost not believe thou seest in me thy wife?

MENELAUS

Thy form resembles her, but the real truth robs me of this belief.

HELEN

Observe me well; what need hast thou of clearer proof?

MENELAUS

Thou art like her; that will I never deny.

HELEN

Who then shall teach thee, unless it be thine own eyes?

MENELAUS

Herein is my dilemma; I have another wife.

HELEN

To Troy I never went; that was a phantom.

MENELAUS

Pray, who fashions living bodies?

HELEN

The air, whence thou hast a wife of heaven's workmanship.

MENELAUS

What god's handiwork? Strange is the tale thou tellest.

HELEN

Hera made it as a substitute, to keep me from Paris.

MENELAUS

How then couldst thou have been here, and in Troy, at the same time?

HELEN

The name may be in many a place at once, though not the body.

MENELAUS

Unhand me! the sorrows I brought with me suffice.

HELEN

What! wilt leave me, and take that phantom bride away?

MENELAUS

For thy likeness unto Helen, fare thee well.

HELEN

Ruined! in thee I found my lord only to lose thee.

MENELAUS

The greatness of my troubles at Troy convinces me; thou dost not.

HELEN

Ah, woe is me! who was ever more unfortunate than I? Those whom I love best are leaving me, nor shall I ever reach Hellas, my own dear native land.

(*The* FIRST MESSENGER *enters in haste.*)

MESSENGER

At last I find thee, Menelaus, after an anxious search, not till I have wandered through the length and breadth of this foreign strand; I am sent by thy comrades, whom thou didst leave behind.

MENELAUS

What news? surely you are not being spoiled by the barbarians?

MESSENGER

A miracle hath happened; my words are too weak for the reality.

MENELAUS

Speak; for judging by this haste, thou hast stirring news.

MESSENGER

My message is: thy countless toils have all been toiled in vain.

MENELAUS

That is an old tale of woe to mourn! come, thy news?

MESSENGER

Thy wife hath disappeared, soaring away into the embracing air; in heaven she now is hidden, and as she left the hollowed cave where we were guarding her, she hailed us thus, "Ye hapless Phrygians, and all Achaea's race! for me upon Scamander's strand by Hera's arts ye died from day to day, in the false belief that Helen was in the hands of Paris But I, since I have stayed my appointed time, and kept the laws of fate, will now depart unto the sky that gave me birth; but the unhappy daughter of Tyndareus, through no fault of hers, hath borne an evil name with-

out reason." (*Catching sight of* HELEN) Daughter of Leda, hail to thee, so thou art here after all! I was just announcing thy departure to the hidden starry realms, little knowing that thou couldst fly at will. I will not a second time let thee flout us thus, for thou didst cause thy lord and his comrades trouble all for naught in Ilium.

MENELAUS

This is even what she said; her words are proved true; O longed-for day, how hath it restored thee to my arms!

HELEN

O Menelaus, dearest husband, the time of sorrow has been long, but joy is now ours at last. Ah, friends, what joy for me to hold my husband in a fond embrace after many a weary cycle of yon blazing lamp of day!

MENELAUS

What joy for me to hold my wife! but with all that I would ask about these years, I now know not where I may first begin

HELEN

O rapture! the very hair upon my head starts up for joy! my tears run down! Around thy neck I fling my arms, dear husband, to hug my joy to me.

MENELAUS

O happy, happy sight! I have no fault to find, my wife, the daughter of Zeus and Leda, is mine again, she whom her brothers on their snow-white steeds, whilst torches blazed, made my happy bride, but gods removed her from my home. Now is the deity guiding us to a new destiny, happier than of yore

HELEN

Evil into good transformed hath brought us twain together at last, dear husband, but late though it be, God grant me joy of my good luck!

MENELAUS

God grant thee joy! I join thee in the self-same prayer, for of us twain one cannot suffer without the other.

HELEN

No more, my friends, I mourn the past; no longer now I grieve. My own dear husband is restored to me, whose coming from Troy I have waited many a long year.

MENELAUS

I to thee, and thou to me. And after these long, long years I have at last discovered the fraud of the goddess. But these tears, in gladness shed, are tears of thankfulness rather than of sorrow.

HELEN

What can I say? What mortal heart could e'er have had such hope? To my bosom I press thee, little as I ever thought to.

MENELAUS

And I to mine press thee, who all men thought hadst gone to Ida's town and the hapless towers of Ilium.

HELEN

Ah me! ah me! that is a bitter subject to begin on.

MENELAUS

Tell me, I adjure thee, how wert thou from my home conveyed?

HELEN

Alas! alas! 'tis a bitter tale thou askest to hear.

MENELAUS

Speak, for I must hear it; all that comes is Heaven's gift.

HELEN

I loathe the story I am now to tell.

MENELAUS

Tell it for all that. 'Tis sweet to hear of trouble past.

HELEN

I ne'er set forth to be the young barbarian's bride, with oars and wings of lawless love to speed me on my way.

MENELAUS

What deity or fate tore thee from thy country, then?

HELEN

Ah, my lord! 'twas Hermes, the son of Zeus, that brought and placed me by the banks of Nile.

MENELAUS

A miracle! Who sent thee thither? O monstrous story!

HELEN

I wept, and still my eyes are wet with tears. 'Twas the wife of Zeus that ruined me

MENELAUS

Hera? wherefore should she afflict us twain?

HELEN

Woe is me for my awful fate! Woe for those founts and baths where the goddesses made brighter still that beauty, which evoked the fatal verdict!

MENELAUS

Why did Hera visit thee with evil regarding this verdict?

HELEN

To wrest the promise of Cypris—

MENELAUS

How now? Say on.

HELEN

From Paris, to whom that goddess pledged me.

MENELAUS

Woe for thee!

HELEN

And so she brought me hither to Egypt to my sorrow.

MENELAUS

Then she gave him a phantom in thy stead, as thou tellest me?

HELEN

And then began those woes of thine, ah, mother! woe is me!

MENELAUS

What meanest thou?

HELEN

My mother is no more; my shameful marriage made her fix the noose about her neck.

MENELAUS

Ah me! is our daughter Hermione yet alive?

HELEN

Still unwed, childless still, she mourns my fatal marriage.

MENELAUS

O Paris, who didst utterly o'erthrow my home, here was thy ruin too and theirs, those countless mail-clad Danai.

HELEN

From my country, city, and from thee heaven cast me forth unhappy and accursed, because I left,—and yet not I,—home and husband for a union of foul shame.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If haply ye find happiness in the future, it will suffice when to the past ye look.

MESSENGER

Menelaus, grant me too a portion of that joy which, though mine own eyes see, I scarcely comprehend.

MENELAUS

Come then, old friend, and share with us our talk.

MESSENGER

Was it not then in her power to decide all the trouble in Troy?

MENELAUS

It was not; I was tricked by the gods into taking to my arms a misty phantom-form, to my sorrow.

MESSENGER

How so? was it then for this we vainly toiled?

MENELAUS

'Twas Hera's handiwork, and the jealousy of three goddesses.

MESSENGER

Is this real woman, then, thy wife?

MENELAUS

This is she; trust my word for that.

MESSENGER

Daughter, how changeful and inscrutable is the nature of God! With some good end doth he vary men's fortune—now up, now down; one suffers; another who ne'er knew suffering, is in his turn to awful ruin brought, having no assurance in his lot from day to day. Thou and thy husband have had your share of trouble—thou in what the world has said, he in battle's heat. For all the striving that he strove, he got him naught; while now, without an effort made, every blessing fortune boasts is his. And thou, in spite of all, hast brought no shame upon thy aged sire, or those twin sons of Zeus, nor art thou guilty of those rumoured crimes. Now again do I recall thy wedding rites, remembering the blazing torch

I bore beside thee in a four-horsed chariot at full gallop; while thou with this thy lord, a new-made bride, wert driving forth from thy happy home. A sorry servant he, whoso regardeth not his master's interest, sympathizing with his sorrows and his joys. Slave though I was born, yet may I be numbered amongst honest servants; for in heart, though not in name, I am free. For this is better far than in my single person to suffer these two evils, to feel my heart corrupt, and as the slave of others to be at my neighbour's beck and call.

MENELAUS

Come, old friend, oft hast thou stood side by side with me and taken thy full share of toil; so now be partner in my happiness. Go, tell my comrades, whom I left behind, the state of matters here, as thou hast found them, and the issue of my fortunes; and bid them wait upon the beach and abide the result of the struggle, which I trow awaits me; and if mayhap we find a way to take this lady from the land by stealth, tell them to keep good watch that we may share the luck and escape, if possible, from the barbarian's clutch.

MESSENGER

It shall be done, O king. Now I see how worthless are the seers' tricks, how full of falsehood; nor is there after all aught trustworthy in the blaze of sacrifice or in the cry of feathered fowls; 'tis folly, the very notion that birds can help mankind. Calchas never by word or sign showed the host the truth, when he saw his friends dying on behalf of a phantom, nor yet did Helenus; but the city was stormed in vain. Perhaps thou wilt say, 'twas not heaven's will that they should do so. Then why do we employ these prophets? Better were it to sacrifice to the gods, and crave a blessing, leaving prophecy alone; for this was but devised as a bait to catch a livelihood, and no man grows rich by divination if he is idle. No! sound judgment and discernment are the best of seers.

(*The* MESSENGER *departs.*)

LEADER

My views about seers agree exactly with this old man's: whoso hath the gods upon his side will have the best seer in his house.

HELEN

Good! so far all is well. But how camest thou, poor husband, safe from Troy? though 'tis no gain to know, yet friends feel a longing to learn all that their friends have suffered.

MENELAUS

That one short sentence of thine contains a host of questions. Why should I tell thee of our losses in the Aegean, or of the beacon Nauplius

lighted on Euboea? or of my visits to Crete and the cities of Libya, or of the peaks of Perseus? For I should never satisfy thee with the tale, and by telling thee should add to my own pain, though I suffered enough at the time; and so would my grief be doubled.

HELEN

Thy answer shows more wisdom than my question. Omit the rest, and tell me only this; how long wert thou a weary wanderer o'er the wide sea's face?

MENELAUS

Seven long years did I see come and go, besides those ten in Troy.

HELEN

Alas, poor sufferer! 'twas a weary while. And thou hast thence escaped only to bleed here.

MENELAUS

How so? what wilt thou tell? Ah wife, thou hast ruined me.

HELEN

Escape and fly with all thy speed from this land. Thou wilt be slain by him whose house this is.

MENELAUS

What have I done to merit such a fate?

HELEN

Thou hast arrived unexpectedly to thwart my marriage.

MENELAUS

What! is some man bent on wedding my wife?

HELEN

Aye, and on heaping those insults on me, which I have hitherto endured.

MENELAUS

Is he some private prince, or a ruler of this land?

HELEN

The son of Proteus, king of the country.

MENELAUS

This was that dark saying I heard the servant tell.

HELEN
At which of the barbarian's gates wert thou standing?

MENELAUS
Here, whence like a beggar I was like to be driven.

HELEN
Surely thou wert not begging food? Ah, woe is me!

MENELAUS
That was what I was doing, though I had not the name of beggar.

HELEN
Of course thou knowest, then, all about my marriage.

MENELAUS
I do. But whether thou hast escaped thy lover, I know not.

HELEN
Be well assured I have kept my body chaste.

MENELAUS
How wilt thou convince me of this? If true, thy words are sweet.

HELEN
Dost see the wretched station I have kept at this tomb?

MENELAUS
I see, alas! a bed of straw; but what hast thou to do with it?

HELEN
There I crave escape from this marriage as a suppliant.

MENELAUS
For want of an altar, or because it is the barbarians' way?

HELEN
This was as good a protection to me as the gods' temples.

MENELAUS
May I not then even bear thee homeward on my ship?

HELEN
The sword far sooner than thy wife's embrace is waiting thee.

MENELAUS
So should I be of all men the most miserable.

HELEN

Put shame aside, and fly from this land.

MENELAUS

Leaving thee behind? 'twas for thy sake I sacked Troy.

HELEN

Better so, than that our union should cause thy death.

MENELAUS

Oh! these are coward words, unworthy of those days at Troy!

HELEN

Thou canst not slay the prince, thy possible intent.

MENELAUS

Hath he, then, a body which steel cannot wound?

HELEN

Thou shalt hear. But to attempt impossibilities is no mark of wisdom.

MENELAUS

Am I to let them bind my hands, and say nothing?

HELEN

Thou art in a dilemma; some scheme must be devised.

MENELAUS

I had liefer die in action than sitting still.

HELEN

There is one hope, and only one, of our safety.

MENELAUS

Will gold, or daring deeds, or winning words procure it?

HELEN

We are safe if the prince learn not of thy coming.

MENELAUS

Will any one tell him it is I? He certainly will not know who I am.

HELEN

He hath within his palace an ally equal to the gods.

MENELAUS

Some voice divine within the secret chambers of his house?

HELEN

No; his sister; Theonoe men call her.

MENELAUS

Her name hath a prophetic sound; tell me what she doth.

HELEN

She knoweth everything, and she will tell her brother thou art come.

MENELAUS

Then must we die; for I cannot escape her ken.

HELEN

Perchance we might by suppliant prayers win her over.

MENELAUS

To what end? To what vain hope art thou leading me?

HELEN

That she should not tell her brother thou art here.

MENELAUS

Suppose we persuade her, can we get away?

HELEN

Easily, if she connive thereat; without her knowledge, no.

MENELAUS

Be that thy task; women deal best with women.

HELEN

I will not fail, be sure, to clasp her knees.

MENELAUS

Come, then; only, suppose she reject our proposals?

HELEN

Thou wilt be slain, and I, alas! wedded by force.

MENELAUS

Thou wilt betray me; that "force" of thine is but an excuse.

HELEN

Nay, by thy life I swear a sacred oath.

MENELAUS

What meanest thou? dost swear to die and never to another husband yield?

HELEN

Yes, by the self-same sword; I will fall by thy side.

MENELAUS

On these conditions touch my right hand.

HELEN

I do so, swearing I will quit the light of day if thou art slain.

MENELAUS

I, too, will end my life if I lose thee.

HELEN

How shall we die so as to gain fame?

MENELAUS

I will slay thee and then myself upon the summit of the tomb. But first will I in doughty fight contest another's claim to thee; and let who will draw nigh! for I will not sully the lustre of my Trojan fame, nor will I, on my return to Hellas, incur a storm of taunts, as one who robbed Thetis of Achilles; saw Ajax, son of Telamon, fall a weltering corpse; and the son of Neleus of his child bereft; shall I then flinch myself from death for my own wife? No, no! For if the gods are wise, o'er a brave man by his foes laid low they lightly sprinkle the earth that is his tomb, while cowards they cast forth on barren rocky soil.

LEADER

Grant, heaven, that the race of Tantalus may at last be blest, and pass from sorrow unto joy!

HELEN

Ah, woe is me! Yea, all my lot is woe; O Menelaus, we are utterly undone! Behold! from forth the house comes Theonoe, the prophetess. The palace echoes as the bolts are unfastened; fly! yet what use to fly? For whether absent or present she knows of thy arrival here. Ah me! how lost am I! Saved from Troy and from a barbarian land, thou hast come only to fall a prey to barbarian swords.

(THEONOE *enters, attended by hand-maidens carrying torches*)

THEONOE

Lead on, bearing before me blazing brands, and, as sacred rites ordain, purge with incense every cranny of the air, that I may breathe heaven's breath free from taint; meanwhile do thou, in case the tread of unclean feet have soiled the path, wave the cleansing flame above it, and brandish the torch in front, that I may pass upon my way. And when to heaven ye have paid the customs I exact, bear back into the house the brand from

off the hearth. What of my prophecy, Helen? how stands it now? Thou hast seen thy husband Menelaus arrive without disguise, reft of his ships, and of thy counterfeit. Ah, hapless man! what troubles hast thou escaped, and art come hither, and yet knowest not whether thou art to return or to abide here; for there is strife in heaven, and Zeus this very day will sit in solemn conclave on thee. Hera, who erst was thy bitter foe, is now grown kind, and is willing to bring thee and thy wife safe home, that Hellas may learn that the marriage of Paris was all a sham, assigned to him by Cypris; but Cypris fain would mar thy homeward course, that she may not be convicted, or proved to have bought the palm of beauty at the price of Helen in a futile marriage. Now the decision rests with me, whether to ruin thee, as Cypris wishes, by telling my brother of thy presence here, or to save thy life by taking Hera's side, concealing thy coming from my brother, for his orders are that I should tell him, whensoe'er thou shouldst reach these shores. Ho! one of you, go show my brother this man is here, that I may secure my safety.

HELEN

Maiden, at thy knees I fall a suppliant, and seat myself in this sad posture on behalf of myself and him, whom I am in danger of seeing slain, after I have so hardly found him. Oh! tell not thy brother that my husband is returned to these loving arms; save us, I beseech thee; never for thy brother's sake sacrifice thy character for uprightness, by evil and unjust means bidding for his favour. For the deity hates violence, and biddeth all men get lawful gains without plundering others. Wealth unjustly gotten, though it bring some power, is to be eschewed. The breath of heaven and the earth are man's common heritage, wherein to store his home, without taking the goods of others, or wresting them away by force. Me did Hermes at a critical time, to my sorrow, intrust to thy father's safe keeping for this my lord, who now is here and wishes to reclaim me. But how can he recover me if he be slain? How could thy sire restore the living to the dead? Oh! consider ere that the will of heaven and thy father's too; would the deity or would thy dead sire restore their neighbour's goods, or would they forbear? restore them, I feel sure. It is not, therefore, right that thou shouldst more esteem thy wanton brother than thy righteous father. Yet if thou, prophetess as thou art and believer in divine providence, shalt pervert the just intention of thy father and gratify thy unrighteous brother, 'tis shameful thou shouldst have full knowledge of the heavenly will, both what is and what is not, and yet be ignorant of justice. Oh! save my wretched life from the troubles which beset it, granting this as an accession to our good fortune; for every living soul loathes Helen, seeing that there is gone a rumour throughout Hellas that I was false unto my lord, and took up my abode in Phrygia's sumptu-

ous halls. Now, if I come to Hellas, and set foot once more in Sparta, they will hear and see how they were ruined by the wiles of goddesses, while I was no traitress to my friends after all; and so will they restore to me my virtuous name again, and I shall give my daughter in marriage, whom no man now will wed; and, leaving this vagrant life in Egypt, shall enjoy the treasures in my home. Had Menelaus met his doom at some funeral pyre, with tears should I be cherishing his memory in a far-off land, but must I lose him now when he is alive and safe? Ah! maiden, I beseech thee, say not so; grant me this boon, I pray, and reflect thy father's justice; for this is the fairest ornament of children, when the child of a virtuous sire resembles its parents in character.

LEADER

Piteous thy pleading, and a piteous object thou! But I fain would hear what Menelaus will say to save his life.

MENELAUS

I will not deign to throw myself at thy knees, or wet mine eyes with tears; for were I to play the coward, I should most foully blur my Trojan fame. And yet men say it shows a noble soul to let the tear-drop fall in misfortune. But that will not be the honourable course that I will choose in preference to bravery, if what I shall say is honourable. Art thou disposed to save a stranger seeking in mere justice to regain his wife, why then restore her and save us likewise; if not, this will not be the first by many a time that I have suffered, though thou wilt get an evil name. All that I deem worthy of me and honest, all that will touch thy heart most nearly, will I utter at the tomb of thy sire with regret for his loss. Old king beneath this tomb of stone reposing, pay back thy trust! I ask of thee my wife whom Zeus sent hither unto thee to keep for me. I know thou canst never restore her to me thyself, for thou art dead; but this thy daughter will never allow her father once so glorious, whom I invoke in his grave, to bear a tarnished name; for the decision rests with her now. Thee, too, great god of death, I call to my assistance, who hast received full many a corpse, slain by me for Helen, and art keeping thy wage; either restore those dead now to life again, or compel the daughter to show herself a worthy equal of her virtuous sire, and give me back my wife. But if ye will rob me of her, I will tell you that which she omitted in her speech. Know then, maiden, I by an oath am bound, first, to meet thy brother sword to sword, when he or I must die; there is no alternative. But if he refuse to meet me fairly front to front, and seek by famine to chase away us suppliants twain at this tomb, I am resolved to slay Helen, and then to plunge this two-edged sword through my own heart, upon the top of the sepulchre, that our streaming blood may trickle down the tomb; and our

two corpses will be lying side by side upon this polished slab, a source of deathless grief to thee, and to thy sire reproach. Never shall thy brother wed Helen, nor shall any other; I will bear her hence myself, if not to my house, at any rate to death. And why this stern resolve? Were I to resort to women's ways and weep, I should be a pitiful creature, not a man of action. Slay me, if it seems thee good; I will not die ingloriously; but better yield to what I say, that thou mayst act with justice, and I regain my wife.

LEADER

On thee, maiden, it rests to judge between these arguments. Decide in such a way as to please one and all.

THEONOE

My nature and my inclination lean towards piety; myself, too, I respect, and I will never sully my father's fair name, or gratify my brother at the cost of bringing myself into open dishonour. For justice hath her temple firmly founded in my nature, and since I have this heritage from Nereus I will strive to save Menelaus; wherefore, seeing it is Hera's will to stand thy friend, I will give my vote with her. May Cypris be favourable to me! though in me she hath no part, and I will try to remain a maid alway. As for thy reproaches against my father at this tomb; lo! I have the same words to utter; I should be wronging thee, did I not restore thy wife; for my sire, were he living, would have given her back into thy keeping, and thee to her. Yea, for there is recompense for these things as well amongst the dead as amongst all those who breathe the breath of life. The soul indeed of the dead lives no more, yet hath it a consciousness that lasts for ever, eternal as the ether into which it takes the final plunge. Briefly then to end the matter, I will observe strict silence on all that ye prayed I should, and never with my counsel will I aid my brother's wanton will. For I am doing him good service, though he little thinks it, if I turn him from his godless life to holiness. Wherefore devise yourselves some way of escape; my lips are sealed; I will not cross your path. First with the goddesses begin, and of the one,—and that one Cypris,—crave permission to return unto thy country; and of Hera, that her goodwill may abide in the same quarter, even her scheme to save thee and thy husband. And thou, my own dead sire, shalt never, in so far as rests with me, lose thy holy name to rank with evil-doers.

(THEONOE *and her attendants enter the palace.*)

LEADER

No man ever prospered by unjust practices, but in a righteous cause there is hope of safety.

HELEN

Menelaus, on the maiden's side are we quite safe. Thou must from that point start, and by contributing thy advice, devise with me a scheme to save ourselves.

MENELAUS

Hearken then; thou hast been a long while in the palace, and art intimate with the king's attendants.

HELEN

What dost thou mean thereby? for thou art suggesting hopes, as if resolved on some plan for our mutual help.

MENELAUS

Couldst thou persuade one of those who have charge of cars and steeds to furnish us with a chariot?

HELEN

I might; but what escape is there for us who know nothing of the country and the barbarian's kingdom?

MENELAUS

True; 'tis impossible. Well, supposing I conceal myself in the palace and slay the king with this two-edged sword?

HELEN

His sister would never refrain from telling her brother that thou wert meditating his death.

MENELAUS

We have not so much as a ship to make our escape in; for the sea hath swallowed the one we had.

HELEN

Hear me, if haply even a woman can utter words of wisdom. Dost thou consent to be dead in word, though not really so?

MENELAUS

'Tis a bad omen; still, if by saying so I shall gain aught, I am ready to be dead in word, though not in deed.

HELEN

I, too, will mourn thee with hair cut short and dirges, as is women's way, before this impious wretch.

MENELAUS

What saving remedy doth this afford us twain? There is deception in thy scheme.

HELEN

I will beg the king of this country leave to bury thee in a cenotaph, as if thou hadst really died at sea.

MENELAUS

Suppose he grant it; how, e'en then, are we to escape without a ship, after having committed me to my empty tomb?

HELEN

I will bid him give me a vessel, from which to let drop into the sea's embrace thy funeral offerings.

MENELAUS

A clever plan in truth, save in one particular; suppose he bid thee rear the tomb upon the strand, thy pretext comes to naught.

HELEN

But I shall say it is not the custom in Hellas to bury those who die at sea upon the shore.

MENELAUS

Thou removest this obstacle too; I then will sail with thee and help stow the funeral garniture in the same ship.

HELEN

Above all, it is necessary that thou and all thy sailors who escaped from the wreck should be at hand

MENELAUS

Be sure if once I find a ship at her moorings, they shall be there man for man, each with his sword.

HELEN

Thou must direct everything; only let there be winds to waft our sails and a good ship to speed before them!

MENELAUS

So shall it be; for the deities will cause my troubles to cease. But from whom wilt thou say thou hadst tidings of my death?

HELEN

From thee; declare thyself the one and only survivor, telling how thou wert sailing with the son of Atreus, and didst see him perish.

MENELAUS

Of a truth the garments I have thrown about me, will bear out my tale that they were rags collected from the wreckage.

HELEN

They come in most opportunely, but they were near being lost just at the wrong time. Maybe that misfortune will turn to fortune.

MENELAUS

Am I to enter the palace with thee, or are we to sit here at the tomb quietly?

HELEN

Abide here; for if the king attempts to do thee any mischief, this tomb and thy good sword will protect thee. But I will go within and cut off my hair, and exchange my white robe for sable weeds, and rend my cheek with this hand's blood-thirsty nail. For 'tis a mighty struggle, and I see two possible issues; either I must die if detected in my plot, or else to my country shall I come and save thy soul alive. O Hera! awful queen, who sharest the couch of Zeus, grant some respite from their toil to two unhappy wretches; to thee I pray, tossing my arms upward to heaven, where thou hast thy home in the star-spangled firmament. Thou, too, that didst win the prize of beauty at the price of my marriage; O Cypris! daughter of Dione, destroy me not utterly. Thou hast injured me enough aforetime, delivering up my name, though not my person, to live amongst barbarians Oh! suffer me to die, if death is thy desire, in my native land. Why art thou so insatiate in mischief, employing every art of love, of fraud, and guileful schemes, and spells that bring bloodshed on families? Wert thou but moderate, only that!—in all else thou art by nature man's most welcome deity; and I have reason so to say.

(HELEN *enters the palace and* MENELAUS *withdraws into the background.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Thee let me invoke, tearful Philomel, lurking 'neath the leafy covert in thy place of song, most tuneful of all feathered songsters, oh! come to aid me in my dirge, trilling through thy tawny throat, as I sing the piteous woes of Helen, and the tearful fate of Trojan dames made subject to Achaea's spear, on the day that there came to their plains one who sped with foreign oar across the dashing billows, bringing to Priam's race from Lacedaemon thee his hapless bride, O Helen,—even Paris, luckless bridegroom, by the guidance of Aphrodite.

antistrophe 1

And many an Achaean hath breathed his last amid the spearmen's thrusts and hurtling hail of stones, and gone to his sad end; for these their wives cut off their hair in sorrow, and their houses are left without a bride; and one [1] of the Achaeans, that had but a single ship, did light a blazing beacon on sea-girt Euboea, and destroy full many of them, wrecking them on the rocks of Caphareus and the shores that front the Aegean main, by the treacherous gleam he kindled; when thou, O Menelaus, from the very day of thy start, didst drift to harbourless hills, far from thy country before the breath of the storm, bearing on thy ship a prize that was no prize, but a phantom made by Hera out of cloud for the Danai to struggle over.

strophe 2

What mortal claims, by searching to the utmost limit, to have found out the nature of God, or of his opposite, or of that which comes between, seeing as he doth this world of man tossed to and fro by waves of contradiction and strange vicissitudes? Thou, Helen, art the daughter of Zeus; for thy sire was the bird that nestled in Leda's bosom; and yet for all that art thou become a by-word for wickedness, through the length and breadth of Hellas, as faithless, treacherous wife and godless woman; nor can I tell what certainty is, whatever may pass for it amongst men. That which gods pronounce have I found true.

antistrophe 2

O fools! all ye who try to win the meed of valour through war and serried ranks of chivalry, seeking thus to still this mortal coil, in senselessness; for if bloody contests are to decide, there will never be any lack of strife in the towns of men; the maidens of the land of Priam left their bridal bowers, though arbitration might have put thy quarrel right, O Helen. And now Troy's sons are in Hades' keeping in the world below, and fire hath darted on her walls, as darts the flame of Zeus, and thou art bringing woe on woe to hapless sufferers in their misery.

(THEOCLYMENUS *and his hunting attendants enter.*)

THEOCLYMENUS

All hail, my father's tomb! I buried thee, Proteus, at the place where men go out, that I might often greet thee; and so, ever as I go out and in, I, thy son Theoclymenus, call on thee, father. Ho! servants, to the palace take my hounds and hunting nets! How often have I blamed myself for never punishing those miscreants with death! I have just heard that a

son of Hellas has come openly to my land, escaping the notice of the guard, a spy maybe or a would-be thief of Helen; death shall be his lot if only I can catch him. Ha! I find all my plans apparently frustrated; the daughter of Tyndareus has deserted her seat at the tomb and sailed away from my shores. Ho! there, undo the bars, loose the horses from their stalls, bring forth my chariot, servants, that the wife, on whom my heart is set, may not get away from these shores unseen, for want of any trouble I can take. Yet stay; for I see the object of my pursuit is still in the palace, and has not fled. (HELEN *enters from the palace, clad in the garb of mourning.*) How now, lady, why hast thou arrayed thee in sable weeds instead of white raiment, and from thy fair head hast shorn thy tresses with the steel, bedewing thy cheeks the while with tears but lately shed? Is it in response to visions of the night that thou art mourning, or, because thou hast heard some warning voice within, art thus distraught with grief?

HELEN

My lord,—for already I have learnt to say that name,—I am undone; my luck is gone; I cease to be.

THEOCLYMENUS

In what misfortune art thou plunged? What hath happened?

HELEN

Menelaus, ah me! how can I say it? is dead, my husband.

THEOCLYMENUS

How knowest thou? Did Theonoe tell thee this?

HELEN

Both she, and one who was there when he perished.

THEOCLYMENUS

What! hath one arrived who actually announces this for certain?

HELEN

One hath; oh may he come e'en as I wish him to!

THEOCLYMENUS

Who and where is he? that I may learn this more surely.

HELEN

There he is, sitting crouched beneath the shelter of this tomb.

THEOCLYMENUS

Great Apollo! how clad in unseemly rags!

HELEN

Ah me! methinks my own husband too is in like plight.

THEOCLYMENUS

From what country is this fellow? whence landed he here?

HELEN

From Hellas, one of the Achaeans who sailed with my husband.

THEOCLYMENUS

What kind of death doth he declare that Menelaus died?

HELEN

The most piteous of all; amid the watery waves at sea.

THEOCLYMENUS

On what part of the savage ocean was he sailing?

HELEN

Cast up on the harbourless rocks of Libya.

THEOCLYMENUS

How was it this man did not perish if he was with him aboard?

HELEN

There are times when churls have more luck than their betters.

THEOCLYMENUS

Where left he the wreck, on coming hither?

HELEN

There, where perdition catch it, but not Menelaus!

THEOCLYMENUS

He is lost; but on what vessel came this man?

HELEN

According to his story sailors fell in with him and picked him up.

THEOCLYMENUS

Where then is that ill thing that was sent to Troy in thy stead?

HELEN

Dost mean the phantom-form of cloud? It hath passed into the air.

THEOCLYMENUS

O Priam, and thou land of Troy, how fruitless thy ruin!

HELEN

I too have shared with Priam's race their misfortunes.

THEOCLYMENUS

Did this fellow leave thy husband unburied, or consign him to the grave?

HELEN

Unburied; woe is me for my sad lot!

THEOCLYMENUS

Wherefore hast thou shorn the tresses of thy golden hair?

HELEN

His memory lingers fondly in this heart, whate'er his fate.

THEOCLYMENUS

Are thy tears in genuine sorrow for this calamity?

HELEN

An easy task no doubt to escape thy sister's detection!

THEOCLYMENUS

No, surely; impossible. Wilt thou still make this tomb thy abode?

HELEN

Why jeer at me? canst thou not let the dead man be?

THEOCLYMENUS

No, thy loyalty to thy husband's memory makes thee fly from me.

HELEN

I will do so no more; prepare at once for my marriage

THEOCLYMENUS

Thou hast been long in bringing thyself to it; still I do commend thee now.

HELEN

Dost know thy part? Let us forget the past

THEOCLYMENUS

On what terms? One good turn deserves another.

HELEN

Let us make peace; be reconciled to me.

THEOCLYMENUS

I relinquish my quarrel with thee; let it take wings and fly away.

HELEN

Then by thy knees, since thou art my friend indeed,—

THEOCLYMENUS

What art so bent on winning, that to me thou stretchest out a suppliant hand?

HELEN

My dead husband would I fain bury.

THEOCLYMENUS

What tomb can be bestowed on lost bodies? Wilt thou bury a shade?

HELEN

In Hellas we have a custom, whene'er one is drowned at sea—

THEOCLYMENUS

What is your custom? The race of Pelops truly hath some skill in matters such as this.

HELEN

To hold a burial with woven robes that wrap no corpse.

THEOCLYMENUS

Perform the ceremony; rear the tomb where'er thou wilt.

HELEN

'Tis not thus we give drowned sailors burial.

THEOCLYMENUS

How then? I know nothing of your customs in Hellas.

HELEN

We unmoor, and carry out to sea all that is the dead man's due.

THEOCLYMENUS

What am I to give thee then for thy dead husband?

HELEN

Myself I cannot say; I had no such experience in my previous happy life.

THEOCLYMENUS

Stranger, thou art the bearer of tidings I welcome.

MENELAUS
Well, I do not, nor yet doth the dead man.

THEOCLYMENUS
How do ye bury those who have been drowned at sea?

MENELAUS
Each according to his means.

THEOCLYMENUS
As far as wealth goes, name thy wishes for this lady's sake.

MENELAUS
There must be a blood-offering first to the dead.

THEOCLYMENUS
Blood of what? Do thou show me and I will comply.

MENELAUS
Decide that thyself; whate'er thou givest will suffice.

THEOCLYMENUS
Amongst barbarians 'tis customary to sacrifice a horse or bull.

MENELAUS
If thou givest at all, let there be nothing mean in thy gift.

THEOCLYMENUS
I have no lack of such in my rich herds

MENELAUS
Next an empty bier is decked and carried in procession.

THEOCLYMENUS
It shall be so; what else is it customary to add?

MENELAUS
Bronze arms; for war was his delight.

THEOCLYMENUS
These will be worthy of the race of Pelops, and these will we give.

MENELAUS
And with them all the fair increase of productive earth.

THEOCLYMENUS
And next, how do ye pour these offerings into the billows?

MENELAUS

There must be a ship ready and rowers.

THEOCLYMENUS

How far from the shore does the ship put out?

MENELAUS

So far that the foam in her wake can scarce be seen from the strand.

THEOCLYMENUS

Why so? wherefore doth Hellas observe this custom?

MENELAUS

That the billow may not cast up again our expiatory offerings.

THEOCLYMENUS

Phoenician rowers will soon cover the distance.

MENELAUS

'Twill be well done, and gratifying to Menelaus, too.

THEOCLYMENUS

Canst thou not perform these rites well enough without Helen?

MENELAUS

This task belongs to mother, wife, or children.

THEOCLYMENUS

'Tis her task then, according to thee, to bury her husband.

MENELAUS

To be sure; piety demands that the dead be not robbed of their due.

THEOCLYMENUS

Well, let her go; 'tis my interest to foster piety in a wife. And thou, enter the house and choose adornment for the dead. Thyself, too, will I not send empty-handed away, since thou hast done her a service. And for the good news thou hast brought me, thou shalt receive raiment instead of going bare, and food, too, that thou mayst reach thy country; for as it is, I see thou art in sorry plight. As for thee, poor lady, waste not thyself in a hopeless case; Menelaus has met his doom, and thy dead husband cannot come to life.

MENELAUS

This then is thy duty, fair young wife; be content with thy present husband, and forget him who has no existence; for this is thy best course in face of what is happening. And if ever I come to Hellas and secure my

safety, I will clear thee of thy former ill-repute, if thou prove a dutiful wife to thy true husband.

HELEN

I will; never shall my husband have cause to blame me; thou shalt thyself attend us and be witness thereto. Now go within, poor wanderer, and seek the bath, and change thy raiment. I will show my kindness to thee, and that without delay. For thou wilt perform all service due with kindlier feeling for my dear lord Menelaus, if at my hands thou meet with thy deserts.

(THEOCLYMENUS, HELEN, MENELAUS *enter the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Through wooded glen, o'er torrent's flood, and ocean's booming waves rushed the mountain-goddess, mother of the gods,[2] in frantic haste, once long ago, yearning for her daughter lost, whose name men dare not utter; loudly rattled the Bacchic castanets in shrill accord, what time those maidens, swift as whirlwinds, sped forth with the goddess on her chariot yoked to wild creatures, in quest of her that was ravished from the circling choir of virgins; here was Artemis with her bow, and there the grim-eyed goddess, sheathed in mail, and spear in hand. But Zeus looked down from his throne in heaven, and turned the issue otherwhither.

antistrophe 1

Soon as the mother ceased from her wild wandering toil, in seeking her daughter stolen so subtly as to baffle all pursuit, she crossed the snow-capped heights of Ida's nymphs; and in anguish cast her down amongst the rocks and brushwood deep in snow; and, denying to man all increase to his tillage from those barren fields, she wasted the human race; nor would she let the leafy tendrils yield luxuriant fodder for the cattle, wherefore many a beast lay dying; no sacrifice was offered to the gods, and on the altars were no cakes to burn; yea, and she made the dew-fed founts of crystal water to cease their flow, in her insatiate sorrow for her child.

strophe 2

But when for gods and tribes of men alike she made an end to festal cheer, Zeus spoke out, seeking to soothe the mother's moody soul, "Ye stately Graces, go banish from Demeter's angry heart the grief her wanderings bring upon her for her child, and go, ye Muses too, with tuneful choir." Thereon did Cypris, fairest of the blessed gods, first catch up the crashing cymbals, native to that land, and

the drum with tight-stretched skin, and then Demeter smiled, and in her hand did take the deep-toned flute, well pleased with its loud note.

antistrophe 2

Thou hast wedded as thou never shouldst have done in defiance of all right, and thou hast incurred, my daughter, the wrath of the great mother by disregarding her sacrifices. Oh! mighty is the virtue in a dress of dappled fawn-skin, in ivy green that twineth round a sacred thyrsus, in whirling tambourines struck as they revolve in air, in tresses wildly streaming for the revelry of Bromius, and likewise in the sleepless vigils of the goddess, when the moon looks down and sheds her radiance o'er the scene. Thou wert confident in thy charms alone.

(HELEN *comes out of the palace alone.*)

HELEN

My friends, within the palace all goes well for us; for the daughter of Proteus, who is privy to our stealthy scheme, told her brother nothing when questioned as to my husband's coming, but for my sake declared him dead and buried. Most fortunate it is my lord hath had the luck to get these weapons; for he is now himself clad in the harness he was to plunge into the sea, his stalwart arm thrust through the buckler's strap, and in his right hand a spear, on pretence of joining in homage to the dead. He hath girded himself most serviceably for the fray, as if to triumph o'er a host of barbarian foes when once we are aboard yon oarèd ship; instead of his rags from the wreck hath he donned the robes I gave for his attire, and I have bathed his limbs in water from the stream, a bath he long hath wanted. But I must be silent, for from the house comes forth the man who thinks he has me in his power, prepared to be his bride; and thy goodwill I also claim and thy strict silence, if haply, when we save ourselves, we may save thee too some day.

(THEOCLYMENUS *and* MENELAUS *enter, with a train of attendants bearing the offerings for the funeral rites.*)

THEOCLYMENUS

Advance in order, servants, as the stranger hath directed, bearing the funeral gifts the sea demands. But thou, Helen, if thou wilt not misconstrue my words, be persuaded and here abide; for thou wilt do thy husband equal service whether thou art present or not. For I am afraid that some sudden shock of fond regret may prompt thee to plunge into the swollen tide, in an ecstasy of gratitude toward thy former husband; for thy grief for him, though he is lost, is running to excess.

HELEN

O my new lord, needs must I honour him with whom I first shared married joys; for I could even die with my husband, so well I loved him; yet how could he thank me, were I to share death's doom with him? Still, let me go and pay his funeral rites unto the dead in person. The gods grant thee the boon I wish and this stranger too, for the assistance he is lending here! And thou shalt find in me a wife fit to share thy house, since thou art rendering kindness to Menelaus and to me; for surely these events are to some good fortune tending. But now appoint someone to give us a ship wherein to convey these gifts, that I may find thy kindness made complete.

THEOCLYMENUS (*to an attendant*)

Go thou, and furnish them with a Sidonian galley of fifty oars and rowers also.

HELEN

Shall not he command the ship who is ordering the funeral?

THEOCLYMENUS

Most certainly; my sailors are to obey him.

HELEN

Repeat the order, that they may clearly understand thee.

THEOCLYMENUS

I repeat it, and will do so yet again if that is thy pleasure.

HELEN

Good luck to thee and to me in my designs!

THEOCLYMENUS

Oh! waste not thy fair complexion with excessive weeping.

HELEN

This day shall show my gratitude to thee.

THEOCLYMENUS

The state of the dead is nothingness; to toil for them is vain.

HELEN

In what I say, this world, as well as that, hath share.

THEOCLYMENUS

Thou shalt not find in me a husband at all inferior to Menelaus.

HELEN

With thee have I no fault to find; good luck is all I need.

THEOCLYMENUS

That rests with thyself, if thou show thyself a loving wife to me.

HELEN

This is not a lesson I shall have to learn now, to love my friends.

THEOCLYMENUS

Is it thy wish that I should escort thee in person with active aid?

HELEN

God forbid! become not thy servant's servant, O king!

THEOCLYMENUS

Up and away! I am not concerned with customs which the race of Pelops holds. My house is pure, for Menelaus did not die here; go some one now and bid my vassal chiefs bring marriage-offerings to my palace; for the whole earth must re-echo in glad accord the hymn of my wedding with Helen, to make men envious. Go, stranger, and pour into the sea's embrace these offerings to Helen's former lord, and then speed back again with my bride, that after sharing with me her marriage-feast thou mayst set out for home, or here abide in happiness.

(THEOCLYMENUS *and his retinue enter the palace.*)

MENELAUS

O Zeus, who art called the father of all and god of wisdom, look down on us and change our woe to joy! Lend us thy ready help, as we seek to drag our fortunes up the rugged hill; if with but thy finger-tip thou touch us, we shall reach our longed-for goal. Sufficient are the troubles we ere this have undergone. Full oft have I invoked you gods to hear my joys and sorrows; I do not deserve to be for ever unhappy, but to advance and prosper. Grant me but this one boon, and so will ye crown my future with blessing.

(MENELAUS, HELEN *and their train of attendants depart.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Hail! thou swift Phoenician ship of Sidon! dear to the rowers, mother to the foam, leader of fair dolphins' gambols, what time the deep is hushed and still, and Ocean's azure child, the queen of calm, takes up her parable and says: "Away! and spread your canvas to the ocean-breeze. Ho! sailors, ho! come grip your oars of pine, speeding Helen on her way to the sheltered beach where Perseus dwelt of yore." [3]

antistrophe 1

It may be thou wilt find the daughters of Leucippus beside the brimming river or before the temple of Pallas, when at last with dance and revelry thou joinest in the merry midnight festival of Hyacinthus, him whom Phoebus slew in the lists by a quoit hurled o'er the mark; wherefore did the son of Zeus ordain that Laconia's land should set apart that day for sacrifice; there too shalt thou find the tender maid, whom ye left in your house, for as yet no nuptial torch has shed its light for her.

strophe 2

Oh! for wings to cleave the air in the track of Libyan cranes, whose serried ranks leave far behind the wintry storm at the shrill summons of some veteran leader, who raises his exultant cry as he wings his way o'er plains that know no rain and yet bear fruitful increase. Ye feathered birds with necks outstretched, comrades of the racing clouds, on! on! till ye reach the Pleiads in their central station and Orion, lord of the night; and as ye settle on Eurotas' banks proclaim the glad tidings that Menelaus hath sacked the city of Dardanus, and will soon be home.

antistrophe 2

Ye sons of Tyndareus at length appear, speeding in your chariot through the sky, denizens of heaven's courts beneath the radiant whirling stars, guide this lady Helen safely o'er the azure main, across the foam-flecked billows of the deep-blue sea, sending the mariners a favouring gale from Zeus; and from your sister snatch the ill-repute of wedding with a barbarian, even the punishment bequeathed to her from that strife on Ida's mount, albeit she never went to the land of Ilium, to the battlements of Phoebus.

(*The* SECOND MESSENGER *enters in haste, as* THEOCLYMENUS *comes out of the palace.*)

SECOND MESSENGER

O king, at last have I found thee in the palace; for new tidings of woe art thou soon to hear from me.

THEOCLYMENUS

How now?

MESSENGER

Make haste to woo a new wife; for Helen hath escaped.

THEOCLYMENUS

Borne aloft on soaring wings, or treading still the earth?

MESSENGER

Menelaus has succeeded in bearing her hence; 'twas he that brought the news of his own death.

THEOCLYMENUS

O monstrous story! what ship conveyed her from these shores? Thy tale is past belief.

MESSENGER

The very ship thou didst thyself give the stranger; and that thou mayest briefly know all, he is gone, taking thy sailors with him.

THEOCLYMENUS

How was it? I long to know, for I never thought that a single arm could master all those sailors with whom thou wert despatched.

MESSENGER

Soon as the daughter of Zeus had left this royal mansion and come unto the sea, daintily picking her way, most craftily she set to mourn her husband, though he was not dead but at her side. Now when we reached thy docks well walled, we began to launch the fastest of Sidonian ships, with her full complement of fifty rowers, and each task in due succession followed; some set up the mast, others ranged the oars with their blades ready, and stored the white sails within the hold, and the rudder was let down astern and fastened securely. While we were thus employed, those Hellenes, who had been fellow-voyagers with Menelaus, were watching us, it seems, and they drew nigh the beach, clad in the rags of shipwrecked men,—well built enough, but squalid to look upon. And the son of Atreus, directly he saw them approach, bespoke them, craftily introducing the reason for his mourning: "Ye hapless mariners, how have ye come hither? your Achaean ship where wrecked? Are ye here to help bury dead Atreus' son, whose missing body this lady, daughter of Tyndareus, is honouring with a cenotaph?" Then they with feigned tears proceeded to the ship, bearing aboard the offerings to be thrown into the deep for Menelaus. Thereat were we suspicious, and communed amongst ourselves regarding the number of extra voyagers; but still we kept silence out of respect for thy orders, for by intrusting the command of the vessel to the stranger thou didst thus spoil all. Now the other victims gave no trouble, and we easily put them aboard; only the bull refused to go forward along the gangway, but rolled his eyes around and kept bellowing, and, arching his back and glaring askance towards his horns, he would not let us touch him. But Helen's lord cried out: "O! ye who laid waste the town of Ilium,

come pick up yon bull, the dead man's offering, on your stout shoulders, as is the way in Hellas, and cast him into the hold;" and as he spoke he drew his sword in readiness. Then they at his command came and caught up the bull and carried him bodily on to the deck. And Menelaus stroked the horse on neck and brow, coaxing it to go aboard. At length, when the ship was fully freighted, Helen climbed the ladder with graceful step and took her seat midway betwixt the rowers' benches, and he sat by her side, even Menelaus who was called dead; and the rest, equally divided on the right and left side of the ship, sat them down, each beside his man, with swords concealed beneath their cloaks, and the billows soon were echoing to the rowers' song, as we heard the boatswain's note. Now when we were put out a space, not very far nor very near, the helmsman asked, "Shall we, sir stranger, sail yet further on our course, or will this serve? For thine it is to command the ship." And he answered: " 'Tis far enough for me," while in his right hand he gripped his sword and stepped on to the prow; then standing o'er the bull to slay it, never a word said he of any dead man, but cut its throat and thus made prayer: "Poseidon, lord of the sea, whose home is in the deep, and ye holy daughters of Nereus, bring me and my wife safe and sound to Nauplia's strand from hence!" Anon a gush of blood, fair omen for the stranger, spouted into the tide. One cried, "There is treachery in this voyage; why should we now sail to Nauplia? Give the order, helmsman, turn thy rudder." But the son of Atreus, standing where he slew the bull, called to his comrades, "Why do ye, the pick of Hellas, delay to smite and slay the barbarians and fling them from the ship into the waves?" While to thy crew the boatswain cried the opposite command: "Ho! some of you catch up chance spars, break up the benches, or snatch the oar-blade from the thole, and beat out the brains of these our foreign foes." Forthwith up sprang each man, the one part armed with poles that sailors use, the other with swords. And the ship ran down with blood; while Helen from her seat upon the stern thus cheered them on: "Where is the fame ye won in Troy? show it against these barbarians." Then as they hasted to the fray, some would fall and some rise up again, while others hadst thou seen laid low in death. But Menelaus in full armour, made his way, sword in hand, to any point where his watchful eye perceived his comrades in distress; so we leapt from the ship and swam, and he cleared the benches of thy rowers. Then did the prince set himself to steer, and bade them make a straight course to Hellas. So they set up the mast, and favouring breezes blew; and they are clear away, while I, from death escaped, let myself down by the anchor chain into the sea; and, just as I was spent, one threw me a rope and rescued me, and drew me to land to bring to thee this message. Ah! there is naught more serviceable to mankind than a prudent distrust.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I would never have believed that Menelaus could have eluded us and thee, O king, in the way he did on his coming.

THEOCLYMENUS

Woe is me! cozened by a woman's tricks! My bride hath escaped me. If the ship could have been pursued and overtaken, I would have used every means forthwith to catch the strangers; as it is, I will avenge myself upon my treacherous sister, in that she saw Menelaus in my palace and did not tell me. Wherefore shall she nevermore deceive another by her prophetic art.

(*A* SERVANT *comes out of the palace.*)

SERVANT

Ho, there! whither away so fast, my lord? on what bloody thought intent?

THEOCLYMENUS

Whither Justice calls me. Out of my path!

SERVANT

I will not loose thy robe, for on grievous mischief art thou bent.

THEOCLYMENUS

Shalt thou, a slave, control thy master?

SERVANT

Yea, for I am in my senses.

THEOCLYMENUS

I should not say so, if thou wilt not let me—

SERVANT

Nay, but that I never will.

THEOCLYMENUS

Slay my sister most accursed.

SERVANT

Say rather, most righteous.

THEOCLYMENUS

"Righteous?" She who betrayed me?

SERVANT

There is an honourable treachery, which 'tis right to commit.

THEOCLYMENUS
By giving my bride to another?

SERVANT
Only to those who had a better right.

THEOCLYMENUS
Who hath any rights o'er mine?

SERVANT
He that received her from her father.

THEOCLYMENUS
Nay, but fortune gave her to me.

SERVANT
And destiny took her away.

THEOCLYMENUS
'Tis not for thee to decide my affairs.

SERVANT
Only supposing mine be the better counsel.

THEOCLYMENUS
So I am thy subject, not thy ruler.

SERVANT
Aye, a subject bound to do the right, and eschew the wrong.

THEOCLYMENUS
It seems thou art eager to be slain.

SERVANT
Slay me; thy sister shalt thou never slay with my consent, but me perchance; for to die for their masters is the fairest death that noble slaves can find.

(THE DIOSCURI *appear from above.*)

DIOSCURI
Restrain those bursts of rage that hurry thee to undue lengths, O Theoclymenus, king of this country. We are the twin sons of Zeus that call to thee by name, whom Leda bore one day, with Helen too who hath fled from thy palace. For thou art wroth for a marriage never destined for thee; nor is thy sister Theonoe, daughter of a Nereid goddess, wronging thee because she honours the word of God and her father's just behests. For it was ordained that Helen should abide within thy halls up till the present

time, but since Troy is razed to the ground and she hath lent her name to the goddesses, no longer need she stay, now must she be united in the self-same wedlock as before, and reach her home and share it with her husband. Withhold then thy malignant blade from thy sister, and believe that she herein is acting with discretion. Long, long ago had we our sister saved, seeing that Zeus has made us gods, but we were too weak for destiny as well as the deities, who willed these things to be. This is my bidding to thee; while to my sister I say, "Sail on with thy husband; and ye shall have a prosperous breeze; for we, thy brethren twain, will course along the deep and bring you safely to your fatherland. And when at last thy goal is reached and thy life ended, thou shalt be famous as a goddess, and with thy twin brethren share the drink-offering, and like us receive gifts from men, for such is the will of Zeus. Yea, and that spot where the son of Maia first appointed thee a home when from Sparta he removed thee, after stealing an image of thee from Heaven's mansions to prevent thy marriage with Paris, even the isle that lies like a sentinel along the Attic coast, shall henceforth be called by thy name amongst men, for that it welcomed thee when stolen from thy home. Moreover, Heaven ordains that the wanderer Menelaus shall find a home within an island of the blest; for to noble souls hath the deity no dislike, albeit these oft suffer more than those of no account."

THEOCLYMENUS

Ye sons of Leda and of Zeus, I will forego my former quarrel about your sister, nor no longer seek to slay mine own. Let Helen to her home repair, if such is Heaven's pleasure. Ye know that ye are sprung of the same stock as your sister, best of women, chastest too; hail then for the true nobility of Helen's soul, a quality too seldom found amongst her sex!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Many are the forms the heavenly will assumes; and many a thing
God brings to pass contrary to expectation: that which was looked
for is not accomplished, while Heaven finds out a way for what we
never hoped; e'en such has been the issue here.[1]

COLERIDGE's translation has been slightly modified in the following lines: 228, 274, 322, 326, 455, 551, 554, 630–631, 664, 689, 758, 786, 791, 809, 834, 841, 890, 893, 918, 955, 956, 995, 1001, 1043, 1056, 1106, 1165, 1204, 1218, 1523, 1550, 1682.

1. *i.e.*, Nauplius.

2. *i.e.*, Demeter.

3. The reference is to Mycenae which Perseus is said to have founded.

4. These lines are found likewise at the conclusion of the *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *The Bacchae*, and, with a slight addition, the *Medea*.

XIII
ELECTRA

Characters in the Play

A Peasant of Mycenae, *husband of* Electra
Electra, *daughter of Agamemnon*
Orestes, *son of Agamemnon*
Pylades, *friend of* Orestes
Chorus of Argive Country-Women
Clytemnestra, *widow of Agamemnon*
Old Man, *formerly servant of Agamemnon*
Messenger
The Dioscuri
Attendants

INTRODUCTION

IN THE *Electra,* which was produced probably in 413 B.C.,[1] Euripides offers his interpretation of the famous legend of the House of Atreus. The play deals with exactly those episodes of the story which Aeschylus presents in his *Choephori,* and Sophocles in his *Electra.* As in the Sophoclean version Euripides opens his tragedy some years after the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. In its main features, *viz.,* the return of Orestes, the killing of Aegisthus, and the final matricide, the Euripidean play corresponds with its counterparts by Aeschylus and Sophocles, but in detail there have been injected several innovations which alter the general significance and the major emphases of the tragedy.

Aeschylus' *Choephori* is integrated into the larger unit of the trilogy, the *Oresteia,* whose central orientation is towards the problem of evil and the nature of the Supreme Being behind the universe. Sophocles in his *Electra* seems to be primarily interested in the psychological study of his main character while she is in the process of bringing about her revenge. He does not explore the religious or theological implications of his problem, nor does he attempt to analyze the psychological or emotional states of his protagonists after the crimes of revenge have been accomplished. Euripides, however, has plumbed more deeply than Sophocles the psychological and emotional states of his characters, and in addition focuses his attention sharply upon them after they have committed their crimes. In this latter respect Euripides' play resembles the *Oresteia,* though of course it does not have the profound religious significance of the Aeschylean tragedy. In effect, Euripides is answering in his play some such questions as these: What happens to people in their inner being who have lived for years with a single overpowering thought,—to exact revenge? What happens to them when once that desire has been realized?

The prologue of the *Electra* gives us immediately a clue with regard to Euripides' purpose. Here we meet with the first of the playwright's innovations, for we discover that Electra has been cruelly compelled by Aegisthus to marry a poor peasant, in order that if she ever bore any progeny, they would be of such inferior quality as never to constitute a

[1] The date is fixed by a fairly certain allusion to the Sicilian expedition in lines 1347 ff.

serious threat to her step-father's royal authority. Electra is living in the peasant's lowly hut, is clad in rags, and is forced to perform menial tasks unsuited to her lofty birth. This opening scene perhaps is an instance of Euripides' illegitimate use of certain dubious means in order to produce pathos. At all events, Electra is placed in a milieu which lends itself to the emotional and psychological analysis to which the poet subjects her.

As the play progresses, Orestes and his trusty Pylades enter, and brother and sister duly recognize one another. And here, by the way, Euripides apparently indulges in criticism of the corresponding recognition scene in Aeschylus' *Choephori,* for the devices which the older poet had used to discover Orestes to Electra are scornfully rejected, and the final recognition is brought about when Electra identifies her brother by means of a scar. From this point on, Euripides works out the remainder of the play in such a fashion as to delineate fully the characters of Clytemnestra, Orestes, and Electra. The Queen, who as a person does not possess the power and force of Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, has often been compared with Hamlet's mother. She relies upon her regular defences, namely that Agamemnon slew her daughter, and brought home from Troy as his concubine the princess, Cassandra. At the same time she gives no evidence that she has any deep convictions, but merely accepts and does not scrutinize too closely the situations in which she has successively found herself. Orestes is presented as a not very strong-willed character who feels that it is his duty to avenge his father, yet who shrinks from the act of matricide. Electra dominates him, and nerves him to commit the murders. She from the outset is portrayed as a woman who long since has given up any hope of achieving happiness. As Gilbert Murray has pointed out,[2] she has been consumed simultaneously by love and hate, and both these passions have remained unsatisfied. For years she has hated her mother and step-father, and has loved her long-exiled brother and murdered father. On the whole neither Orestes nor Electra entirely commands our sympathy, yet their sudden reaction into a state of abject remorse after Clytemnestra has been killed, helps to give them stature. As they face their lives at the end of the play, they seem to have attained to the level of tragic characters.

Euripides closes his drama by employing the device of the *deus ex machina.* The Dioscuri appear, and, after a more than tacit criticism of Apollo for directing Orestes to kill his mother, command the youth to go to Athens where finally in the court of the Areopagus he will be cleared of his guilt. This final scene brings the play in general line with the Aeschylean version, but how much can be inferred from the scene to throw light on Euripides' religious views remains a question. It may be that here Euripides is leveling an attack against the superstitious belief in a god

[2] Cf. the introduction to his translation of the *Electra,* p viii.

like Apollo who wreaks such havoc with human lives as he has in the case of Orestes. On the other hand the Dioscuri may simply be the playwright's mechanical device of bringing the play to an end, after he has completed the psychological study of his main characters. Or finally, the scene may reflect a central doubt in Euripides' mind as to whether man may ever know anything about the divine nature, and it may further reveal the poet's conviction that man lives under some kind of divine control, and that it is his obligation to face that life, and endure it courageously, no matter what may be its terms.

ELECTRA

(SCENE:—*Before the hut of the* PEASANT, *in the country on the borders of Argolis. It is just before sunrise. The* PEASANT *is discovered alone.*)

PEASANT

O ARGOS, ancient land, and streams of Inachus, whence on a day king Agamemnon sailed to the realm of Troy, carrying his warriors aboard a thousand ships; and after he had slain Priam who was reigning in Ilium and captured the famous city of Dardanus, he came hither to Argos and has set up high on the temple-walls many a trophy, spoil of the barbarians. Though all went well with him in Troy, yet was he slain in his own palace by the guile of his wife Clytemnestra and the hand of Aegisthus, son of Thyestes. So he died and left behind him the ancient sceptre of Tantalus, and Aegisthus reigns in his stead, with the daughter of Tyndareus, Agamemnon's queen, to wife. Now as for those whom he left in his halls, when he sailed to Troy, his son Orestes and his tender daughter Electra,—the boy Orestes, as he was like to be slain by Aegisthus, his sire's old foster-father secretly removed to the land of Phocis and gave to Strophius to bring up, but the maid Electra abode in her father's house, and soon as she had budded into maidenhood, came all the princes of Hellas asking her hand in marriage. But Aegisthus kept her at home for fear she might bear a son to some chieftain who would avenge Agamemnon, nor would he betroth her unto any. But when e'en thus there seemed some room for fear that she might bear some noble lord a child by stealth and Aegisthus was minded to slay her, her mother, though she had a cruel heart, yet rescued the maiden from his hand. For she could find excuses for having slain her husband, but she feared the hatred she would incur for her children's murder. Wherefore Aegisthus devised this scheme; on Agamemnon's son who had escaped his realm by flight he set a price to be paid to any who should slay him, while he gave Electra to me in marriage, whose ancestors were citizens of Mycenae. It is not *that* I blame myself for; my family was noble enough, though certainly impoverished, and so

my good birth suffers. By making for her this weak alliance he thought he would have little to fear. For if some man of high position had married her, he might have revived the vengeance for Agamemnon's murder, which now is sleeping; in which case Aegisthus would have paid the penalty. But Cypris is my witness that I have ever respected her maidenhood; she is still as though unwed. Unworthy as I am, honour forbids that I should so affront the daughter of a better man. Yea, and I am sorry for Orestes, hapless youth, who is called my kinsman, to think that he should ever return to Argos and behold his sister's wretched marriage. And whoso counts me but a fool for leaving a tender maid untouched when I have her in my house, to him I say, he measures purity by the vicious standard of his own soul, a standard like himself.

(ELECTRA *enters from the hut, carrying a water pitcher on her head. She is meanly clad.*)

ELECTRA

O sable night, nurse of the golden stars! beneath thy pall I go to fetch water from the brook with my pitcher poised upon my head, not indeed because I am forced to this necessity, but that to the gods I may display the affronts Aegisthus puts upon me, and to the wide firmament pour out my lamentation for my sire. For my own mother, the baleful daughter of Tyndareus, hath cast me forth from her house to gratify her lord; for since she hath borne other children to Aegisthus she puts me and Orestes on one side at home.

PEASANT

Oh! why, poor maiden, dost thou toil so hard on my behalf, thou that aforetime wert reared so daintily? why canst thou not forego thy labour, as I bid thee?

ELECTRA

As a god's I count thy kindness to me, for in my distress thou hast never made a mock at me. 'Tis rare fortune when mortals find such healing balm for their cruel wounds as 'tis my lot to find in thee. Wherefore I ought, though thou forbid me, to lighten thy labours, as far as my strength allows, and share all burdens with thee to ease thy load. Thou hast enough to do abroad; 'tis only right that I should keep thy house in order. For when the toiler cometh to his home from the field, it is pleasant to find all comfortable in the house.

PEASANT

If such thy pleasure, go thy way; for, after all, the spring is no great distance from my house. And at break of day I will drive my steers to my glebe and sow my crop. For no idler, though he has the gods' names ever on his lips, can gather a livelihood without hard work.

(ELECTRA *and the* PEASANT *go out. A moment later* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter.*)

ORESTES

Ah! Pylades, I put thee first 'mongst men for thy love, thy loyalty and friendliness to me; for thou alone of all my friends wouldst still honour poor Orestes, in spite of the grievous plight whereto I am reduced by Aegisthus, who with my accursed mother's aid slew my sire. I am come from Apollo's mystic shrine to the soil of Argos, without the knowledge of any, to avenge my father's death upon his murderers. Last night I went unto his tomb and wept thereon, cutting off my hair as an offering and pouring o'er the grave the blood of a sheep for sacrifice, unmarked by those who lord it o'er this land. And now though I enter not the walled town, yet by coming to the borders of the land I combine two objects; I can escape to another country if any spy me out and recognize me, and at the same time seek my sister, for I am told she is a maid no longer but is married and living here, that I may meet her, and, after enlisting her aid in the deed of blood, learn for certain what is happening in the town. Let us now, since dawn is uplifting her radiant eye, step aside from this path. For maybe some labouring man or serving maid will come in sight, of whom we may inquire whether it is here that my sister hath her home. Lo! yonder I see a servant bearing a full pitcher of water on her shaven head; let us sit down and make inquiry of this bond-maid, if haply we may glean some tidings of the matter which brought us hither, Pylades.

(*They retire a little, as* ELECTRA *returns from the spring.*)

ELECTRA (*chanting*)

strophe 1

Bestir thy lagging feet, 'tis high time; on, on o'er thy path of tears! ah misery! I am Agamemnon's daughter, she whom Clytemnestra, hateful child of Tyndareus, bare; hapless Electra is the name my countrymen call me. Ah me! for my cruel lot, my hateful existence! O my father Agamemnon! in Hades art thou laid, butchered by thy wife and Aegisthus. Come, raise with me that dirge once more; uplift the woful strain that brings relief.

antistrophe 1

On, on o'er thy path of tears! ah misery! And thou, poor brother, in what city and house art thou a slave, leaving thy suffering sister behind in the halls of our fathers to drain the cup of bitterness? Oh! come, great Zeus, to set me free from this life of sorrow, and to avenge my sire in the blood of his foes, bringing the wanderer home to Argos.

strophe 2

Take this pitcher from my head, put it down, that I may wake betimes, while it is yet night, my lamentation for my sire, my doleful chant, my dirge of death, for thee, my father in thy grave, which day by day I do rehearse, rending my skin with my nails, and smiting on my shaven head in mourning for thy death. Woe, woe! rend the cheek; like a swan with clear loud note beside the brimming river calling to its parent dear that lies a-dying in the meshes of the crafty net, so I bewail thee, my hapless sire,

antistrophe 2

After that last fatal bath of thine laid out most piteously in death. Oh! the horror of that axe which hacked thee so cruelly, my sire! oh! the bitter thought that prompted thy return from Troy! With no garlands or victor's crowns did thy wife welcome thee, but with his two-edged sword she made thee the sad sport of Aegisthus and kept her treacherous paramour.

(*The* CHORUS OF ARGIVE COUNTRY-WOMEN *enter. The following lines between* ELECTRA *and the* CHORUS *are sung responsively.*)

CHORUS

strophe

O Electra, daughter of Agamemnon, to thy rustic cot I come, for a messenger hath arrived, a highlander from Mycenae, one who lives on milk, announcing that the Argives are proclaiming a sacrifice for the third day from now, and all our maidens are to go to Hera's temple.

ELECTRA

Kind friends, my heart is not set on festivity, nor do necklaces of gold cause any flutter in my sorrowing bosom, nor will I stand up with the maidens of Argos to beat my foot in the mazy dance. Tears have been my meat day and night; ah misery! See my unkempt hair, my tattered dress; are they fit for a princess, a daughter of Agamemnon, or for Troy which once thought of my father as its captor?

CHORUS

antistrophe

Mighty is the goddess; so come, and borrow of me broidered robes for apparel and jewels of gold that add a further grace to beauty's charms. Dost think to triumph o'er thy foes by tears, if thou honour not the gods? 'Tis not by lamentation but by pious prayers to heaven that thou, my daughter, wilt make fortune smile on thee.

ELECTRA

No god hearkens to the voice of lost Electra, or heeds the sacrifices offered by my father long ago. Ah woe for the dead! woe for the living wanderer, who dwelleth in some foreign land, an outcast and a vagabond at a menial board, sprung though he is of a famous sire! Myself, too, in a poor man's hut do dwell, wasting my soul with grief, an exile from my father's halls, here by the scarred hill-side; while my mother is wedded to a new husband in a marriage stained by blood.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Many a woe to Hellas and thy house did Helen, thy mother's sister, cause.

ELECTRA (*catching sight of* ORESTES *and* PYLADES)

Ha! Friends, I break off my lament; yonder are strangers just leaving the place of ambush where they were couching, and making for the house. We must seek to escape the villains by flying, thou along the path and I into my cottage.

ORESTES

Stay, poor maid; fear no violence from me.

ELECTRA

O Phoebus Apollo! I beseech thee spare my life.

ORESTES

Give me the lives of others more my foes than thou!

ELECTRA

Begone! touch me not! thou hast no right to.

ORESTES

There is none I have a better right to touch.

ELECTRA

How is it then thou waylayest me, sword in hand, near my house?

ORESTES

Wait and hear, and thou wilt soon agree with me

ELECTRA

Here I stand; I am in thy power in any case, since thou art the stronger.

ORESTES

I am come to thee with news of thy brother.

ELECTRA

O best of friends! is he alive or dead?

ORESTES

Alive; I would fain give thee my good news first.

ELECTRA

God bless thee! in return for thy welcome tidings.

ORESTES

I am prepared to share that blessing between us.

ELECTRA

In what land is my poor brother spending his dreary exile?

ORESTES

His ruined life does not conform to the customs of any one city.

ELECTRA

Surely he does not want for daily bread?

ORESTES

Bread he has, but an exile is a helpless man at best.

ELECTRA

What is this message thou hast brought from him?

ORESTES

He asks, "Art thou alive? and if so, How art thou faring?"

ELECTRA

Well, first thou seest how haggard I am grown.

ORESTES

So wasted with sorrow that I weep for thee.

ELECTRA

Next mark my head, shorn and shaven like a Scythian's.

ORESTES

Thy brother's fate and father's death no doubt disturb thee.

ELECTRA

Yes, alas! for what have I more dear than these?

ORESTES

Ah! and what dost thou suppose is dearer to thy brother?

ELECTRA

He is far away, not here to show his love to me.

ORESTES

Wherefore art thou living here far from the city?

ELECTRA

I am wedded, sir; a fatal match!

ORESTES

Alas! for thy brother; I pity him. Is thy husband of Mycenae?

ELECTRA

He is not the man to whom my father ever thought of betrothing me.

ORESTES

Tell me all, that I may report it to thy brother.

ELECTRA

I live apart from my husband in this house.

ORESTES

The only fit inmate would be a hind or herd.

ELECTRA

Poor he is, yet he displays a generous consideration for me.

ORESTES

Why, what is this consideration that attaches to thy husband?

ELECTRA

He has never presumed to claim from me a husband's rights.

ORESTES

Is he under a vow of chastity? or does he disdain thee?

ELECTRA

He thought he had no right to flout my ancestry.

ORESTES

How was it he was not overjoyed at winning such a bride?

ELECTRA

He does not recognize the right of him who disposed of my hand.

ORESTES

I understand; he was afraid of the vengeance of Orestes hereafter.

ELECTRA

There was that fear, but he was a virtuous man as well.

ORESTES

Ah! a noble nature this! He deserves kind treatment.

ELECTRA

Yes, if ever the wanderer return.

ORESTES

But did thy own mother give in to this?

ELECTRA

'Tis her husband, not her children that a woman loves, sir stranger.

ORESTES

Wherefore did Aegisthus put this affront on thee?

ELECTRA

His design in giving me to such a husband was to weaken my offspring.

ORESTES

To prevent thee bearing sons, I suppose, who should punish him?

ELECTRA

That was his plan; God grant I may avenge me on him for it!

ORESTES

Does thy mother's husband know that thou art yet a maid?

ELECTRA

He does not; our silence robs him of that knowledge.

ORESTES

Are these women friends of thine, who overhear our talk?

ELECTRA

They are, and they will keep our conversation perfectly secret.

ORESTES

What could Orestes do in this matter, if he *did* return?

ELECTRA

Canst thou ask? Shame on thee for that! Is not this the time for action?

ORESTES

But suppose he comes, how could he slay his father's murderers?

ELECTRA

By boldly meting out the same fate that his father had meted out to him by his foes.

ORESTES

Wouldst thou be brave enough to help him slay his mother?

ELECTRA

Aye, with the self-same axe that drank my father's blood.

ORESTES

Am I to tell him this, and that thy purpose firmly holds?

ELECTRA

Once I have shed my mother's blood o'er his, then welcome death!

ORESTES

Ah! would Orestes were standing near to hear that!

ELECTRA

I should not know him, sir, if I saw him.

ORESTES

No wonder; you were both children when you parted.

ELECTRA

There is only one of my friends would recognize him.

ORESTES

The man maybe who is said to have snatched him away from being murdered?

ELECTRA

Yes, the old servant who tended my father's childhood long ago.

ORESTES

Did thy father's corpse obtain burial?

ELECTRA

Such burial as it was, after his body had been flung forth from the palace.

ORESTES

O God! how awful is thy story! Yes, there *is* a feeling, arising even from another's distress, that wrings the human heart. Say on, that when I know the loveless tale, which yet I needs must hear, I may carry it to thy brother. For pity, though it has no place in ignorant natures, is inborn in

the wise; still it may cause trouble to find excessive cleverness amongst the wise.

LEADER

I too am stirred by the same desire as the stranger. For dwelling so far from the city I know nothing of its ills, and I should like to hear about them now myself.

ELECTRA

I will tell you, if I may, and surely I may tell a friend about my own and my father's grievous misfortunes. Now since thou movest me to speak, I entreat thee, sir, tell Orestes of our sorrows; first, describe the dress I wear, the load of squalor that oppresses me, the hovel I inhabit after my royal home; tell him how hard I have to work at weaving clothes myself or else go barely clad and do without; how I carry home on my head water from the brook; no part have I in holy festival, no place amid the dance; a maiden still I turn from married dames and from Castor too, to whom they betrothed me before he joined the heavenly host, for I was his kinswoman. Meantime my mother, 'mid the spoils of Troy, is seated on her throne, and at her foot-stool slaves from Asia stand and wait, captives of my father's spear, whose Trojan robes are fastened with brooches of gold. And there on the wall my father's blood still leaves a deep dark stain, while his murderer mounts the dead man's car and fareth forth, proudly grasping in his blood-stained hands the sceptre with which Agamemnon would marshal the sons of Hellas. Dishonoured lies his grave; naught as yet hath it received of drink outpoured or myrtle-spray, but bare of ornament his tomb is left. Yea, and 'tis said that noble hero who is wedded to my mother, in his drunken fits, doth leap upon the grave, and pelt with stones my father's monument, boldly gibing at us on this wise, "Where is thy son Orestes? Is he ever coming in his glory to defend thy tomb?" Thus is Orestes flouted behind his back. Oh! tell him this, kind sir, I pray thee. And there be many calling him to come,—I am but their mouthpiece,—these suppliant hands, this tongue, my broken heart, my shaven head, and his own father too. For 'tis shameful that the sire should have destroyed Troy's race and the son yet prove too weak to pit himself against one foe unto the death, albeit he has youth and better blood as well.

LEADER

Lo! here is thy husband hurrying homeward, his labour done.

PEASANT

(*entering and catching sight of strangers talking to* ELECTRA)

Ha! who are these strangers I see at my door? And why are they come

hither to my rustic gate? can they want my help? for 'tis unseemly for a woman to stand talking with young men.

ELECTRA

Dear husband, be not suspicious of me. For thou shalt hear the truth; these strangers have come to bring me news of Orestes. Good sirs, pardon him those words.

PEASANT

What say they? is that hero yet alive and in the light of day?

ELECTRA

He is; at least they say so, and I believe them.

PEASANT

Surely then he hath some memory of his father and thy wrongs?

ELECTRA

These are things to hope for; a man in exile is helpless.

PEASANT

What message have they brought from Orestes?

ELECTRA

He sent them to spy out my evil case.

PEASANT

Well, they only see a part of it, though maybe thou art telling them the rest.

ELECTRA

They know all; there is nothing further they need ask.

PEASANT

Long ere this then shouldst thou have thrown open our doors to them. Enter, sirs; for in return for your good tidings, shall ye find such cheer as my house affords. Ho! servants, take their baggage within; make no excuses, for ye are friends sent by one I love; and poor though I am, yet will I never show meanness in my habits.

ORESTES

'Fore heaven! is this the man who is helping thee to frustrate thy marriage, because he will not shame Orestes?

ELECTRA

This is he whom they call my husband, woe is me!

ORESTES

Ah! there is no sure mark to recognize a man's worth; for human nature hath in it an element of confusion. For I have seen ere now the son of a noble sire prove himself a worthless knave, and virtuous children sprung from evil parents; likewise dearth in a rich man's spirit, and in a poor man's frame a mighty soul. By what standard then shall we rightly judge these things? By wealth? An evil test to use. By poverty then? Nay, poverty suffers from this, that it teaches a man to play the villain from necessity. To martial prowess must I turn? But who could pronounce who is the valiant man merely from the look of his spear? Better is it to leave these matters to themselves without troubling. For here is a man of no account in Argos, with no family reputation to boast, one of the common herd, proved a very hero. A truce to your folly! ye self-deceivers, swollen with idle fancies; learn to judge men by their converse, and by their habits decide who are noble. Such are they who rule aright both states and families; while those forms of flesh, devoid of intellect, are but figure-heads in the market-place. The strong arm, again, no more than the weak awaits the battle-shock, for this depends on natural courage. Well! absent or present, Agamemnon's son, whose business brings us here, deserves this of us, so let us accept a lodging in this house. (*Calling to his servants*) Ho! sirrahs, go within. A humble host, who does his best, in preference to a wealthy man for me! And so I thankfully accept this peasant's proffered welcome, though I could have preferred that thy brother were conducting me to share his fortune in his halls. Maybe he yet will come; for the oracles of Loxias are sure, but to man's divining "Farewell" say I.

(ORESTES, PYLADES *and their attendants go into the hut.*)

LEADER

Electra, I feel a warmer glow of joy suffuse my heart than ever heretofore; perchance our fortune, moving on at last, will find a happy resting-place.

ELECTRA

O reckless man, why didst thou welcome strangers like these, so far beyond thy station, knowing the poverty of thy house?

PEASANT

Why? if they are really as noble as they seem, surely they will be equally content with rich or humble fare.

ELECTRA

Well, since thou hast made this error, poor man as thou art, go to my father's kind old foster-sire; on the bank of the river Tanaus, the boundary 'twixt Argos and the land of Sparta, he tends his flocks, an outcast

from the city; bid him come hither to our house and make some provision for the strangers' entertainment. Glad will he be, and will offer thanks to heaven to hear that the child, whom once he saved, is yet alive. I shall get nothing from my mother from my ancestral halls; for we should rue our message, were she to learn, unnatural wretch! that Orestes liveth.

PEASANT

I will take this message to the old man, if it seem good to thee; but get thee in at once and there make ready. A woman, when she chooses, can find dainties in plenty to garnish a feast. Besides, there is quite enough in the house to satisfy them with food for one day at least. 'Tis in such cases, when I come to muse thereon, that I discern the mighty power of wealth, whether to give to strangers, or to expend in curing the body when it falls sick; but our daily food is a small matter; for all of us, rich as well as poor, are in like case, as soon as we are satisfied.

(*The* PEASANT *departs as* ELECTRA *enters the hut.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Ye famous ships, that on a day were brought to land at Troy by those countless oars, what time ye led the Nereids' dance, where the dolphin music-loving rolled and gambolled round your dusky prows, escorting Achilles, nimble son of Thetis, when he went with Agamemnon to the banks of Trojan Simois;

antistrophe 1

When Nereids left Euboea's strand, bringing from Hephaestus' golden forge the harness he had fashioned for that warrior's use; him long they sought o'er Pelion and Ossa's spurs, ranging the sacred glens and the peaks of Nymphaea, where his knightly sire was training up a light for Hellas, even the sea-born son of Thetis, a warrior swift to help the sons of Atreus.

strophe 2

One that came from Ilium, and set foot in the haven of Nauplia, told me that on the circle of thy far-famed targe, O son of Thetis, was wrought this blazon, a terror to the Phrygians; on the rim of the buckler Perseus with winged sandals, was bearing in his hand across the main the Gorgon's head, just severed by the aid of Hermes, the messenger of Zeus, that rural god whom Maia bore;

antistrophe 2

While in the centre of the shield the sun's bright orb flashed light on the backs of his winged coursers; there too was the heavenly choir

of stars, Pleiades and Hyades, to dazzle Hector's eyes and make him flee; and upon his gold-forged helm were sphinxes, bearing in their talons the prey of which the minstrels sing; on his breast-plate was a lioness breathing flame, her eye upon Peirene's steed,[1] in eagerness to rend it.

There too in murderous fray four-footed steeds were prancing, while o'er their backs uprose dark clouds of dust. But he who led these warriors stout, was slain by wedding thee, malignant child of Tyndareus! Wherefore shall the gods of heaven one day send thee to thy doom, and I shall yet live to see the sword at thy throat, drinking its crimson tide.

(*The* OLD MAN, *the former servant of Agamemnon, enters.* ELECTRA *presently appears at the door of the hut.*)

OLD MAN

Where is the young princess, my mistress, Agamemnon's daughter, whom I nursed in days gone by? Oh! how steep is the approach to this house, a hard climb for these old wasted feet of mine! Still, to reach such friends as these, I must drag my bent old back and tottering knees up it. Ah, daughter!—for I see thee now at thy door,—lo! I have brought thee this tender lamb from my own flock, having taken it from its dam, with garlands too and cheese straight from the press, and this flask of choice old wine with fragrant bouquet; 'tis small perhaps, but pour a cup thereof into some weaker drink, and it is a luscious draught. Let some one carry these gifts into the house for the guests; for I would fain wipe from my eyes the rising tears on this tattered cloak.

ELECTRA

Why stands the tear-drop in thine eye, old friend? Is it that my sorrows have been recalled to thee after an interval? or art thou bewailing the sad exile of Orestes, and my father's fate, whom thou didst once fondle in thy arms, in vain, alas! for thee and for thy friends?

OLD MAN

Ah yes! in vain; but still I could not bear to leave him thus; and so I added this to my journey that I sought his grave, and, falling thereupon, wept o'er its desolation; then did I open the wine-skin, my gift to thy guests, and poured a libation, and set myrtle-sprigs round the tomb. And lo! upon the grave itself I saw a black ram had been offered, and there was blood, not long poured forth, and severed locks of auburn hair. Much I wondered, my daughter, who had dared approach the tomb; certainly 'twas no Argive. Nay, thy brother may perchance have come by stealth,

and going thither have done honour to his father's wretched grave. Look at the hair, compare it with thy own, to see if the colour of these cut locks is the same; for children in whose veins runs the same father's blood have a close resemblance in many features.

ELECTRA

Old sir, thy words are unworthy of a wise man, if thou thinkest my own brave brother would have come to this land by stealth for fear of Aegisthus. In the next place, how should our hair correspond? His is the hair of a gallant youth trained up in manly sports, mine a woman's curled and combed; nay, that is a hopeless clue. Besides, thou couldst find many, whose hair is of the same colour, albeit not sprung from the same blood. No, maybe 'twas some stranger cut off his hair in pity at his tomb, or one that came to spy this land privily.

OLD MAN

Put thy foot in the print of his shoe and mark whether it correspond with thine, my child.

ELECTRA

How should the foot make any impression on stony ground? and if it did, the foot of brother and sister would not be the same in size, for a man's is the larger.

OLD MAN

Hast thou no mark, in case thy brother *should* come, whereby to recognize the weaving of thy loom, the robe wherein I snatched him from death that day?

ELECTRA

Dost thou forget I was still a babe when Orestes left the country? and even if I had woven him a robe, how should he, a mere child then, be wearing the same now, unless our clothes and bodies grow together?

OLD MAN

Where are these guests? I fain would question them face to face about thy brother.

(*As he speaks,* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *come out of the hut.*)

ELECTRA

There they are, in haste to leave the house.

OLD MAN

Well born, it seems, but that may be a sham; for there be plenty such prove knaves. Still I give them greeting.

ORESTES

All hail, father! To which of thy friends, Electra, does this old relic of mortality belong?

ELECTRA

This is he who nursed my sire, sir stranger.

ORESTES

What! do I behold him who removed thy brother out of harm's way?

ELECTRA

Behold the man who saved his life; if, that is, he liveth still.

ORESTES

Ha! why does he look so hard at me, as if he were examining the bright device on silver coin? Is he finding in me a likeness to some other?

ELECTRA

Maybe he is glad to see in thee a companion of Orestes.

ORESTES

A man I love full well. But why is he walking round me?

ELECTRA

I, too, am watching his movements with amaze, sir stranger.

OLD MAN

My honoured mistress, my daughter Electra, return thanks to heaven,—

ELECTRA

For past or present favours? which?

OLD MAN

That thou hast found a treasured prize, which God is now revealing.

ELECTRA

Hear me invoke the gods. But what dost thou mean, old man?

OLD MAN

Behold before thee, my child, thy nearest and dearest.

ELECTRA

I have long feared thou wert not in thy sound senses.

OLD MAN

Not in my sound senses, because I see thy brother?

ELECTRA

What mean'st thou, aged friend, by these astounding words?

OLD MAN

That I see Orestes, Agamemnon's son, before me.

ELECTRA

What mark dost see that I can trust?

OLD MAN

A scar along his brow, where he fell and cut himself one day in his father's home when chasing a fawn with thee.

ELECTRA

Is it possible? True; I see the mark of the fall.

OLD MAN

Dost hesitate then to embrace thy own dear brother?

ELECTRA

No! not any longer, old friend; for my soul is convinced by the tokens thou showest. O my brother, thou art come at last, and I embrace thee, little as I ever thought to.

ORESTES

And thee to my bosom at last I press.

ELECTRA

I never thought that it would happen.

ORESTES

All hope in me was also dead.

ELECTRA

Art thou really he?

ORESTES

Aye, thy one and only champion, if I can but safely draw to shore the cast I mean to throw; and I feel sure I shall; else must we cease to believe in gods, if wrong is to triumph o'er right.

CHORUS (*singing*)

At last, at last appears thy radiant dawn, O happy day! and as a beacon to the city hast thou revealed the wanderer, who, long ago, poor boy! was exiled from his father's halls. Now, lady, comes our turn for victory, ushered in by some god. Raise hand and voice in prayer, beseech the gods that good fortune may attend thy brother's entry to the city.

ORESTES

Enough! sweet though the rapture of this greeting be, I must wait and return it hereafter. Do thou, old friend so timely met, tell me how I am to avenge me on my father's murderer, and on my mother, the partner in his guilty marriage. Have I still in Argos any band of kindly friends? or am I, like my fortunes, bankrupt altogether? With whom am I to league myself? by night or day shall I advance? point out a road for me to take against these foes of mine.

OLD MAN

My son, thou hast no friend now in thy hour of adversity. No! that is a piece of rare good luck, to find another share thy fortunes alike for better and for worse. Thou art of every friend completely reft, all hope is gone from thee; be sure of what I tell thee; on thy own arm and fortune art thou wholly thrown to win thy father's home and thy city.

ORESTES

What must I do to compass this result?

OLD MAN

Slay Thyestes' son and thy mother.

ORESTES

I came to win that victor's crown, but how can I attain it?

OLD MAN

Thou wouldst never achieve it if thou didst enter the walls.

ORESTES

Are they manned with guards and armed sentinels?

OLD MAN

Aye truly; for he is afraid of thee, and cannot sleep secure.

ORESTES

Well then, do thou next propose a scheme, old friend.

OLD MAN

Hear me a moment; an idea has just occurred to me.

ORESTES

May thy counsel prove good, and my perception keen!

OLD MAN

I saw Aegisthus, as I was slowly pacing hither—

ORESTES
I welcome thy words. Where was he?

OLD MAN
Not far from these fields, at his stables.

ORESTES
What was he doing? I see a gleam of hope after our helplessness.

OLD MAN
I thought he was preparing a feast for the Nymphs.

ORESTES
In return for the bringing up of children or in anticipation of a birth?

OLD MAN
All I know is this, he was preparing to sacrifice oxen.

ORESTES
How many were with him? or was he alone with his servants?

OLD MAN
There was no Argive there; only a band of his own followers.

ORESTES
Is it possible that any of them will recognize me, old man?

OLD MAN
They are only servants, and they have never even seen thee.

ORESTES
Will they support me, if I prevail?

OLD MAN
Yes, that is the way of slaves, luckily for thee.

ORESTES
On what pretext can I approach him?

OLD MAN
Go to some place where he will see thee as he sacrifices.

ORESTES
His estate is close to the road then, I suppose.

OLD MAN
Yes, and when he sees thee there, he will invite thee to the feast.

ORESTES
So help me God! He shall rue his invitation.

OLD MAN
After that, form thy own plan according to circumstances.

ORESTES
Good advice! But my mother, where is she?

OLD MAN
At Argos; but she will yet join her husband for the feast.

ORESTES
Why did she not come forth with him?

OLD MAN
From fear of the citizens' reproach she stayed behind.

ORESTES
I understand; she knows that the city suspects her.

OLD MAN
Just so; her wickedness makes her hated.

ORESTES
How shall I slay her and him together?

ELECTRA
Mine be the preparation of my mother's slaying!

ORESTES
Well, as for the other, fortune will favour us.

ELECTRA
Our old friend here must help us both.

OLD MAN
Aye, that will I; but what is thy scheme for slaying thy mother?

ELECTRA
Go, old man, and tell Clytemnestra from me that I have given birth to a son.

OLD MAN
Some time ago, or quite recently?

ELECTRA
Ten days ago, which are the days of my purification.

OLD MAN

Suppose it done; but how doth this help towards slaying thy mother?

ELECTRA

She will come, when she hears of my confinement.

OLD MAN

What! dost think she cares aught for thee, my child?

ELECTRA

Oh yes! she will weep no doubt over my child's low rank.

OLD MAN

Perhaps she may; but go back again to the point.

ELECTRA

Her death is certain, if she comes.

OLD MAN

In that case, let her come right up to the door of the house.

ELECTRA

Why then it were a little thing to turn her steps into the road to Hades' halls.

OLD MAN

Oh! to see this one day, then die!

ELECTRA

First of all, old friend, act as my brother's guide.

OLD MAN

To the place where Aegisthus is now sacrificing to the gods?

ELECTRA

Then go, find my mother and give her my message.

OLD MAN

Aye, that I will, so that she shall think the very words are thine.

ELECTRA (*to* ORESTES)

Thy work begins at once; thou hast drawn the first lot in the tragedy.

ORESTES

I will go, if some one will show me the way.

OLD MAN

I will myself conduct thee nothing loth.

ORESTES

O Zeus, god of my fathers, vanquisher of my foes, have pity on us, for a piteous lot has ours been.

ELECTRA

Oh! have pity on thy own descendants.

ORESTES

O Hera, mistress of Mycenae's altars, grant us the victory, if we are asking what is right.

ELECTRA

Yes, grant us vengeance on them for our father's death.

ORESTES

Thou too, my father, sent to the land of shades by wicked hands, and Earth, the queen of all, to whom I spread my suppliant palms, up and champion thy dear children. Come with all the dead to aid, all they who helped thee break the Phrygians' power, and all who hate ungodly crime. Dost hear me, father, victim of my mother's rage?

ELECTRA

Sure am I he heareth all, but 'tis time to part. For this cause too I bid thee strike Aegisthus down, because, if thou fall in the struggle and perish, I also die; no longer number me amongst the living; for I will stab myself with a two-edged sword. And now will I go indoors and make all ready there, for, if there come good news from thee, my house shall ring with women's cries of joy; but, if thou art slain, a different scene must then ensue. These are my instructions to thee.

ORESTES

I know my lesson well.

(ORESTES, PYLADES, *the* OLD MAN, *and attendants, depart.*)

ELECTRA

Then show thyself a man. And you, my friends, signal to me by cries the certain issue of this fray. Myself will keep the sword ready in my grasp, for I will never accept defeat, and yield my body to my enemies to insult.

(ELECTRA *goes into the hut.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Still the story [2] finds a place in time-honoured legends, how on a day Pan, the steward of husbandry, came breathing dulcet music on his jointed pipe, and brought with him from its tender dam on Argive

hills, a beauteous lamb with fleece of gold; then stood a herald high upon the rock and cried aloud, "Away to the place of assembly, ye folk of Mycenae! to behold the strange and awful sight vouchsafed to our blest rulers." Anon the dancers did obeisance to the family of Atreus;

antistrophe 1

The altar-steps of beaten gold were draped; and through that Argive town the altars blazed with fire; sweetly rose the lute's clear note, the handmaid of the Muse's song; and ballads fair were written on the golden lamb, saying that Thyestes had the luck; for he won the guilty love of the wife of Atreus, and carried off to his house the strange creature, and then coming before the assembled folk he declared to them that he had in his house that hornèd beast with fleece of gold.

strophe 2

In the self-same hour it was that Zeus changed the radiant courses of the stars, the light of the sun, and the joyous face of dawn, and drave his car athwart the western sky with fervent heat from heaven's fires, while northward fled the rain-clouds, and Ammon's strand grew parched and faint and void of dew, when it was robbed of heaven's genial showers.

antistrophe 2

'Tis said, though I can scarce believe it, the sun turned round his glowing throne of gold, to vex the sons of men by this change because of the quarrel amongst them. Still, tales of horror have their use in making men regard the gods; of whom thou hadst no thought, when thou slewest thy husband, thou mother of this noble pair.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hark! my friends, did ye hear that noise, like to the rumbling of an earthquake, or am I the dupe of idle fancy? Hark! hark! once more that wind-borne sound swells loudly on mine ear. Electra! mistress mine! come forth from the house!

ELECTRA (*rushing out*)

What is it, good friends? how goes the day with us?

LEADER

I hear the cries of dying men; no more I know.

ELECTRA

I heard them too, far off, but still distinct.

LEADER

Yes, the sound came stealing from afar, but yet 'twas clear.

ELECTRA

Was it the groan of an Argive, or of my friends?

LEADER

I know not; for the cries are all confused.

ELECTRA

That word of thine is my death-warrant; why do I delay?

LEADER

Stay, till thou learn thy fate for certain.

ELECTRA

No, no; we are vanquished; where are our messengers?

LEADER

They will come in time; to slay a king is no light task.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters in haste.*)

MESSENGER

All hail! ye victors, maidens of Mycenae, to all Orestes' friends his triumph I announce; Aegisthus, the murderer of Agamemnon, lies welter-ing where he fell; return thanks to heaven.

ELECTRA

Who art thou? What proof dost thou give of this?

MESSENGER

Look at me, dost thou not recognize thy brother's servant?

ELECTRA

O best of friends! 'twas fear that prevented me from recognizing thee; now I know thee well. What sayst thou? Is my father's hateful murderer slain?

MESSENGER

He is; I repeat it since it is thy wish.

LEADER

Ye gods, and Justice, whose eye is on all, at last art thou come.

ELECTRA

I fain would learn the way and means my brother took to slay Thyestes' son.

MESSENGER

After we had set out from this house, we struck into the broad high-road, and came to the place where was the far-famed King of Mycenae. Now he was walking in a garden well-watered, culling a wreath of tender myrtle-sprays for his head, and when he saw us, he called out, "All hail! strangers; who are ye? whence come ye? from what country?" To him Orestes answered, "We are from Thessaly, on our way to Alpheus' banks to sacrifice to Olympian Zeus." When Aegisthus heard that, he said, "Ye must be my guests to-day, and share the feast, for I am even now sacrificing to the Nymphs; and by rising with tomorrow's light ye will be just as far upon your journey; now let us go within." Therewith he caught us by the hand and led us by the way; refuse we could not; and when we were come to the house, he gave command: "Bring water for my guests to wash forthwith, that they may stand around the altar near the laver." But Orestes answered, " 'Twas but now we purified ourselves and washed us clean in water from the river. So if we strangers are to join your citizens in sacrifice, we are ready, King Aegisthus, and will not refuse." So ended they their private conference. Meantime the servants, that composed their master's bodyguard, laid aside their weapons, and one and all were busied at their tasks. Some brought the bowl to catch the blood, others took up baskets, while others kindled fire and set cauldrons round about the altars, and the whole house rang. Then did thy mother's husband take the barley for sprinkling, and began casting it upon the hearth with these words, "Ye Nymphs, who dwell among the rocks, grant that I may often sacrifice with my wife, the daughter of Tyndareus, within my halls, as happily as now, and ruin seize my foes!" (whereby he meant Orestes and thyself). But my master, lowering his voice, offered a different prayer, that he might regain his father's house. Next Aegisthus took from a basket a long straight knife, and cutting off some of the calf's hair, laid it with his right hand on the sacred fire, and then cut its throat when the servants had lifted it upon their shoulders, and thus addressed thy brother; "Men declare that amongst the Thessalians this is counted honourable, to cut up a bull neatly and to manage steeds. So take the knife, sir stranger, and show us if rumour speaks true about the Thessalians." Thereon Orestes seized the Dorian knife of tempered steel and cast from his shoulders his graceful buckled robe; then choosing Pylades to help him in his task, he made the servants withdraw, and catching the calf by the hoof, proceeded to lay bare its white flesh, with arm outstretched, and he flayed the hide quicker than a runner ever finishes the two laps

of the horses' race-course; next he laid the belly open, and Aegisthus took the entrails in his hands and carefully examined them. Now the liver had no lobe, while the portal vein leading to the gall-bladder portended a dangerous attack on him who was observing it. Dark grows Aegisthus' brow, but my master asks, "Why so despondent, good sir?" Said he, "I fear treachery from a stranger. Agamemnon's son of all men most I hate, and he hates my house." But Orestes cried, "What! fear treachery from an exile! thou the ruler of the city? Ho! take this Dorian knife away and bring me a Thessalian cleaver, that we by sacrificial feast may learn the will of heaven; let me cleave the breast-bone." And he took the axe and cut it through. Now Aegisthus was examining the entrails, separating them in his hands, and as he was bending down, thy brother rose on tiptoe and smote him on the spine, severing the bones of his back; and his body gave one convulsive shudder from head to foot and writhed in the death-agony. No sooner did his servants see it, than they rushed to arms, a host to fight with two; yet did Pylades and Orestes of their valiancy meet them with brandished spears. Then cried Orestes, "I am no foe that come against this city and my own servants, but I have avenged me on the murderer of my sire, I, ill-starred Orestes. Slay me not, my father's former thralls!" They, when they heard him speak, restrained their spears, and an old man, who had been in the family many a long year, recognized him. Forthwith they crown thy brother with a wreath, and utter shouts of joy. And lo! he is coming to show thee the head, not the Gorgon's, but the head of thy hated foe Aegisthus; his death to-day has paid in blood a bitter debt of blood.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Dear mistress, now with step as light as fawn join in the dance; lift high the nimble foot and be glad. Victory crowns thy brother; he hath won a fairer wreath than ever victor gained beside the streams of Alpheus; so raise a fair hymn to victory, the while I dance.

ELECTRA

O light of day! O bright careering sun! O earth! and night erewhile my only day; now may I open my eyes in freedom, for Aegisthus is dead, my father's murderer. Come friends, let me bring out whate'er my house contains to deck his head and wreath with crowns my conquering brother's brow.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Bring forth thy garlands for his head, and we will lead the dance the Muses love. Now shall the royal line, dear to us in days gone by, resume its sway o'er the realm, having laid low the usurper as he deserves. So let the shout go up, whose notes are those of joy.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter, followed by attendants who are bearing the body of Aegisthus.*)

ELECTRA

Hail! glorious victor, Orestes, son of a sire who won the day 'neath Ilium's walls, accept this wreath to bind about the tresses of thy hair. Not in vain hast thou run thy course unto the goal and reached thy home again; no! but thou hast slain thy foe, Aegisthus, the murderer of our father. Thou too, O Pylades, trusty squire, whose training shows thy father's sterling worth, receive a garland from my hand, for thou no less than he hast a share in this emprise; and so I pray, good luck be thine for ever!

ORESTES

First recognize the gods, Electra, as being the authors of our fortune, and then praise me their minister and fate's. Yea, I come from having slain Aegisthus in very deed, no mere pretence; and to make thee the more certain of this, I am bringing thee his corpse, which, if thou wilt, expose for beasts to rend, or set it upon a stake for birds, the children of the air, to prey upon; for now is he thy slave, once called thy lord and master.

ELECTRA

I am ashamed to utter my wishes.

ORESTES

What is it? speak out, for thou art through the gates of fear.

ELECTRA

I am ashamed to flout the dead, for fear some spite assail me.

ORESTES

No one would blame thee for this.

ELECTRA

Our folk are hard to please, and love to blame.

ORESTES

Speak all thy mind, sister; for we entered on this feud with him on terms admitting not of truce.

ELECTRA

Enough! (*Turning to the corpse of Aegisthus*) With which of thy iniquities shall I begin my recital? With which shall I end it? To which allot a middle place? And yet I never ceased, as each day dawned, to rehearse the story I would tell thee to thy face, if ever I were freed from my old

terrors; and now I am; so I will pay thee back with the abuse I fain had uttered to thee when alive. Thou wert my ruin, making me and my brother orphans, though we had never injured thee, and thou didst make a shameful marriage with my mother, having slain her lord who led the host of Hellas, though thyself didst never go to Troy. Such was thy folly, thou didst never dream that my mother would prove thy curse when thou didst marry her, though thou wert wronging my father's honour. Know this; whoso defiles his neighbour's wife, and afterward is forced to take her to himself, is a wretched wight, if he supposes she will be chaste as his wife, though she sinned against her former lord. Thine was a life most miserable, though thou didst pretend 'twas otherwise; well thou knewest how guilty thy marriage was, and my mother knew she had a villain for husband. Sinners both ye took each other's lot, she thy fortune, thou her curse. While everywhere in Argos thou wouldst hear such phrases as, "that woman's husband," never "that man's wife." Yet 'tis shameful for the wife and not the man to rule the house; wherefore I loathe those children, who are called in the city not the sons of the man, their father, but of their mother. For if a man makes a great match above his rank, there is no talk of the husband but only of the wife. Herein lay thy grievous error, due to ignorance; thou thoughtest thyself some one, relying on thy wealth, but this is naught save to stay with us a space. 'Tis nature that stands fast, not wealth. For it, if it abide unchanged, exalts man's horn; but riches dishonestly acquired and in the hands of fools, soon take their flight, their blossom quickly shed. As for thy sins with women, I pass them by, 'tis not for maiden's lips to mention them, but I will shrewdly hint thereat. And then thy arrogance! because forsooth thou hadst a palace and some looks to boast. May I never have a husband with a girl's face, but one that bears him like a man! For the children of these latter cling to a life of arms, while those, who are so fair to see, do only serve to grace the dance. Away from me! (*Spurning the corpse with her foot*) Time has shown thy villainy, little as thou reckest of the forfeit thou hast paid for it. Let none suppose, though he have run the first stage of his course with joy, that he will get the better of Justice, till he have reached the goal and ended his career.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Terrible alike his crime and your revenge; for mighty is the power of justice.

ORESTES

'Tis well. Carry his body within the house and hide it, sirrahs, that, when my mother comes, she may not see his corpse before she is smitten herself.

(PYLADES *and the attendants take the body into the hut.*)

ELECTRA

Hold! let us strike out another scheme.

ORESTES

How now? Are those allies from Mycenae whom I see?

ELECTRA

No, 'tis my mother, that bare me.

ORESTES

Full into the net she is rushing, oh, bravely!

ELECTRA

See how proudly she rides in her chariot and fine robes!

ORESTES

What must we do to our mother? Slay her?

ELECTRA

What! has pity seized thee at sight of her?

ORESTES

O God! how can I slay her that bare and suckled me?

ELECTRA

Slay her as she slew thy father and mine.

ORESTES

O Phoebus, how foolish was thy oracle—

ELECTRA

Where Apollo errs, who shall be wise?

ORESTES

In bidding me commit this crime—my mother's murder!

ELECTRA

How canst thou be hurt by avenging thy father?

ORESTES

Though pure before, I now shall carry into exile the stain of a mother's blood.

ELECTRA

Still, if thou avenge not thy father, thou wilt fail in thy duty.

ORESTES

And if I slay my mother, I must pay the penalty to her.

ELECTRA

And so must thou to him, if thou resign the avenging of our father.

ORESTES

Surely it was a fiend in the likeness of the god that ordered this!

ELECTRA

Seated on the holy tripod? I think not so.

ORESTES

I cannot believe this oracle was meant.

ELECTRA

Turn not coward! Cast not thy manliness away!

ORESTES

Am I to devise the same crafty scheme for her?

ELECTRA

The self-same death thou didst mete out to her lord Aegisthus.

ORESTES

I will go in; 'tis an awful task I undertake; an awful deed I have to do; still if it is Heaven's will, be it so; I loathe and yet I love the enterprise.

(*As* ORESTES *withdraws into the hut,* CLYTEMNESTRA *enters in a chariot. Her attendants are hand-maidens attired in gorgeous apparel.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Hail! Queen of Argos, daughter of Tyndareus, sister of those two noble sons of Zeus,[3] who dwell in the flame-lit firmament amid the stars, whose guerdon high it is to save the sailor tossing on the sea. All hail! because of thy wealth and high prosperity, I do thee homage as I do the blessed gods. Now is the time, great queen, for us to pay our court unto thy fortunes.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Alight from the car, ye Trojan maids, and take my hand that I may step down from the chariot. With Trojan spoils the temples of the gods are decked, but I have obtained these maidens as a special gift from Troy, in return for my lost daughter, a trifling boon no doubt, but still an ornament to my house.

ELECTRA

And may not I, mother, take that highly-favoured hand of thine? I am a slave like them, an exile from my father's halls in this miserable abode.

CLYTEMNESTRA

See, my servants are here; trouble not on my account.

ELECTRA

Why, thou didst make me thy prisoner by robbing me of my home; like these I became a captive when my home was taken, an orphan all forlorn.

CLYTEMNESTRA

True, but thy father plotted so wickedly against those of his own kin whom least of all he should have treated so. Speak I must; albeit, when a woman gets an evil reputation, there is a feeling of bitterness against all she says; unfairly indeed in my case, for it were only fair to hate after learning the circumstances, and seeing if the object deserves it; otherwise, why hate at all? Now Tyndareus bestowed me on thy father not that I or any children I might bear should be slain. Yet he went and took my daughter from our house to the fleet at Aulis, persuading me that Achilles was to wed her; and there he held her o'er the pyre, and cut Iphigenia's snowy throat. Had he slain her to save his city from capture, or to benefit his house, or to preserve his other children, a sacrifice of one for many, I could have pardoned him. But, as it was, his reasons for murdering my child were these: the wantonness of Helen and her husband's folly in not punishing the traitress. Still, wronged as I was, my rage had not burst forth for this, nor would I have slain my lord, had he not returned to me with that frenzied maiden and made her his mistress, keeping at once two brides beneath the same roof. Women maybe are given to folly, I do not deny it; this granted, when a husband goes astray and sets aside his own true wife, she fain will follow his example and find another love; and then in our case hot abuse is heard, while the men, who are to blame for this, escape without a word. Again, suppose Menelaus had been secretly snatched from his home, should I have had to kill Orestes to save Menelaus, my sister's husband? How would thy father have endured this? Was he then to escape death for slaying what was mine, while I was to suffer at his hands? I slew him, turning, as my only course, to his enemies. For which of all thy father's friends would have joined me in his murder? Speak all that is in thy heart, and prove against me with all free speech, that thy father's death was not deserved.

ELECTRA

Justly urged! but thy justice is not free from shame; for in all things should every woman of sense yield to her husband. Whoso thinketh otherwise comes not within the scope of what I say. Remember, mother, those last words of thine, allowing me free utterance before thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Daughter, far from refusing it, I grant it again.

ELECTRA

Thou wilt not, when thou hearest, wreak thy vengeance on me?

CLYTEMNESTRA

No, indeed; I shall welcome thy opinion.

ELECTRA

Then will I speak, and this shall be the prelude of my speech: Ah, mother mine! would thou hadst had a better heart; for though thy beauty and Helen's win you praises well deserved, yet are ye akin in nature, a pair of wantons, unworthy of Castor. She was carried off, 'tis true, but her fall was voluntary; and thou hast slain the bravest soul in Hellas, excusing thyself on the ground that thou didst kill a husband to avenge a daughter; the world does not know thee so well as I do, thou who before ever thy daughter's death was decided, yea, soon as thy lord had started from his home, wert combing thy golden tresses at thy mirror. That wife who, when her lord is gone from home, sets to beautifying herself, strike off from virtue's list; for she has no need to carry her beauty abroad, save she is seeking some mischief. Of all the wives in Hellas thou wert the only one I know who wert overjoyed when Troy's star was in the ascendant, while, if it set, thy brow was clouded, since thou hadst no wish that Agamemnon should return from Troy. And yet thou couldst have played a virtuous part to thy own glory. The husband thou hadst was no whit inferior to Aegisthus, for he it was whom Hellas chose to be her captain. And when thy sister Helen wrought that deed of shame, thou couldst have won thyself great glory, for vice is a warning and calls attention to virtue. If, as thou allegest, my father slew thy daughter, what is the wrong I and my brother have done thee? How was it thou didst not bestow on us our father's halls after thy husband's death, instead of bartering them to buy a paramour? Again, thy husband is not exiled for thy son's sake, nor is he slain to avenge my death, although by him this life is quenched twice as much as e'er my sister's was; so if murder is to succeed murder in requital, I and thy son Orestes must slay thee to avenge our father; if that was just, why so is this. Whoso fixes his gaze on wealth or noble birth and weds a wicked woman, is a fool; better is a humble partner in his home, if she be virtuous, than a proud one.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Chance rules the marriages of women; some I see turn out well, others ill, amongst mankind.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Daughter, 'twas ever thy nature to love thy father. This too one finds; some sons cling to their father, others have a deeper affection for their mother. I will forgive thee, for myself am not so exceeding glad at the deed that I have done, my child.

But thou,—why thus unwashed and clad in foul attire, now that the days of thy lying-in are accomplished? Ah me, for my sorry schemes! I have goaded my husband into anger more than e'er I should have done.

ELECTRA

Thy sorrow comes too late; the hour of remedy has gone from thee, my father is dead. Yet why not recall that exile, thy own wandering son?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I am afraid; 'tis my interest, not his that I regard. For they say he is wroth for his father's murder.

ELECTRA

Why, then, dost thou encourage thy husband's bitterness against us?

CLYTEMNESTRA

'Tis his way; thou too hast a stubborn nature.

ELECTRA

Because I am grieved; yet will I check my spirit.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I promise then he shall no longer oppress thee.

ELECTRA

From living in my home he grows too proud.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now there! 'tis thou that art fanning the quarrel into new life.

ELECTRA

I say no more; my dread of him is even what it is.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Peace! Enough of this. Why didst thou summon me, my child?

ELECTRA

Thou hast heard, I suppose, of my confinement; for this I pray thee, since I know not how, offer the customary sacrifice on the tenth day after birth, for I am a novice herein, never having had a child before.

CLYTEMNESTRA

This is work for another, even for her who delivered thee.

ELECTRA

I was all alone in my travail and at the babe's birth.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Dost live so far from neighbours?

ELECTRA

No one cares to make the poor his friends.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Well, I will go to offer to the gods a sacrifice for the child's completion of the days; and when I have done thee this service, I will seek the field where my husband is sacrificing to the Nymphs. Take this chariot hence, my servants, and tie the horses to the stalls; and when ye think that I have finished my offering to the gods, attend me, for I must likewise pleasure my lord.

(*She goes into the hut.*)

ELECTRA

Enter our humble cottage; but, prithee, take care that my smoke-grimed walls soil not thy robes; now wilt thou offer to the gods a fitting sacrifice. There stands the basket ready, and the knife is sharpened, the same that slew the bull, by whose side thou soon wilt lie a corpse; and thou shalt be his bride in Hades' halls whose wife thou wast on earth. This is the boon I will grant thee, while thou shalt pay me for my father's blood.

(ELECTRA *follows her into the hut.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe

Misery is changing sides; the breeze veers round, and now blows fair upon my house. The day is past when my chief fell murdered in his bath, and the roof and the very stones of the walls rang with this his cry: "O cruel wife, why art thou murdering me on my return to my dear country after ten long years?"

antistrophe

The tide is turning, and justice that pursues the faithless wife is drawing within its grasp the murderess, who slew her hapless lord, when he came home at last to these towering Cyclopean walls,—aye, with her own hand she smote him with the sharpened steel, herself the axe uplifting. Unhappy husband! whate'er the curse that possessed that wretched woman. Like a lioness of the hills that rangeth through the woodland for her prey, she wrought the deed.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

O my children, by Heaven I pray ye spare your mother.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Dost hear her cries within the house?

CLYTEMNESTRA

O God! ah me!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I too bewail thee, dying by thy children's hands. God deals out His justice in His good time. A cruel fate is thine, unhappy one; yet didst thou sin in murdering thy lord.

(ORESTES *and* ELECTRA *come out of the hut, followed by attendants who are carrying the two corpses. The following lines between* ELECTRA, ORESTES *and the* CHORUS *are chanted.*)

But lo! from the house they come, dabbled in their mother's fresh-spilt gore, their triumph proving the piteous butchery. There is not nor ever has been a race more wretched than the line of Tantalus.

ORESTES

O Earth, and Zeus whose eye is over all! behold this foul deed of blood, these two corpses lying here that I have slain in vengeance for my sufferings.

ELECTRA

Tears are all too weak for this, brother; and I am the guilty cause. Ah, woe is me! How hot my fury burned against the mother that bare me!

ORESTES

Alas! for thy lot, O mother mine! A piteous, piteous doom, aye, worse than that, hast thou incurred at children's hands! Yet justly hast thou paid forfeit for our father's blood. Ah, Phoebus! thine was the voice that praised this vengeance; thou it is that hast brought these hideous scenes to light, and caused this deed of blood. To what city can I go henceforth? what friend, what man of any piety will bear the sight of a mother's murderer like me?

ELECTRA

Ah me! alas! and whither can I go? What share have I henceforth in dance or marriage rite? What husband will accept me as his bride?

ORESTES

Again thy fancy changes with the wind; for now thou thinkest aright, though not so formerly; an awful deed didst thou urge thy

brother against his will to commit, dear sister. Oh! didst thou see how the poor victim threw open her robe and showed her bosom as I smote her, sinking on her knees, poor wretch? And her hair I—

ELECTRA

Full well I know the agony through which thou didst pass at hearing thy own mother's bitter cry.

ORESTES

Ah yes! she laid her hand upon my chin, and cried aloud, "My child, I entreat thee!" and she clung about my neck, so that I let fall the sword.

ELECTRA

O my poor mother! How didst thou endure to see her breathe her last before thy eyes?

ORESTES

I threw my mantle o'er them and began the sacrifice by plunging the sword into my mother's throat.

ELECTRA

Yet 'twas I that urged thee on, yea, and likewise grasped the steel. Oh! I have done an awful deed.

ORESTES

Oh! take and hide our mother's corpse beneath a pall, and close her gaping wound. (*Turning to the corpse*) Ah! thy murderers were thine own children.

ELECTRA (*covering the corpse*)

There! thou corpse both loved and loathed; still o'er thee I cast a robe, to end the grievous troubles of our house.

CHORUS

See! where o'er the roof-top spirits are appearing, or gods maybe from heaven, for this is not a road that mortals tread. Why come they thus where mortal eyes can see them clearly?

(THE DIOSCURI *appear from above.*)

DIOSCURI

Hearken, son of Agamemnon. We, the twin sons of Zeus, thy mother's sisters, call thee, even Castor and his brother Polydeuces. 'Tis but now we have reached Argos after stilling the fury of the sea for mariners, having seen the slaying of our sister, thy mother. She hath received her

just reward, but thine is no righteous act, and Phoebus—but no! he is my king, my lips are sealed—is Phoebus still, albeit the oracle he gave thee was no great proof of his wisdom. But we must acquiesce herein. Henceforth must thou follow what Zeus and destiny ordain for thee. On Pylades bestow Electra for his wife to take unto his home; do thou leave Argos, for after thy mother's murder thou mayst not set foot in the city. And those grim goddesses of doom, that glare like savage hounds, will drive thee mad and chase thee to and fro; but go thou to Athens and make thy prayer to the holy image of Pallas, for she will close their fierce serpents' mouths, so that they touch thee not, holding o'er thy head her aegis with the Gorgon's head. A hill there is, to Ares sacred, where first the gods in conclave sat to decide the law of blood, in the day that savage Ares slew Halirrothius, son of the ocean-king, in anger for the violence he offered to his daughter's honour; from that time all decisions given there are most holy and have heaven's sanction. There must thou have this murder tried, and if equal votes are given, they shall save thee from death in the decision, for Loxias will take the blame upon himself, since it was his oracle that advised thy mother's murder. And this shall be the law for all posterity; in every trial the accused shall win his case if the votes are equal. Then shall those dread goddesses, stricken with grief at this, vanish into a cleft of the earth close to the hill, revered by men henceforth as a place for holy oracles; whilst thou must settle in a city of Arcadia on the banks of the river Alpheus near the shrine of Lycaean Apollo, and the city shall be called after thy name. To thee I say this. As for the corpse of Aegisthus, the citizens of Argos must give it burial; but Menelaus, who has just arrived at Nauplia from the sack of Troy, shall bury thy mother, Helen helping him; for she hath come from her sojourn in Egypt in the halls of Proteus, and hath never been to Troy; but Zeus, to stir up strife and bloodshed in the world, sent forth a phantom of Helen to Ilium.[4] Now let Pylades take his maiden wife and bear her to his home in Achaea; also he must conduct thy so-called kinsman[5] to the land of Phocis, and there reward him well. But go thyself along the narrow Isthmus, and seek Cecropia's happy home. For once thou hast fulfilled the doom appointed for this murder, thou shalt be blest and free from all thy troubles.

(*The remaining lines of the play are chanted.*)

CHORUS

Ye sons of Zeus, may we draw near to speak with you?

DIOSCURI

Ye may, since ye are not polluted by this murder.

ORESTES

May I too share your converse, sons of Tyndareus?

DIOSCURI

Thou too! for to Phoebus will I ascribe this deed of blood.

CHORUS

How was it that ye, the brothers of the murdered woman, gods too, did not ward the doom-goddesses from her roof?

DIOSCURI

'Twas fate that brought resistless doom to her, and that thoughtless oracle that Phoebus gave.

ELECTRA

But why did the god, and wherefore did his oracles make me my mother's murderer?

DIOSCURI

A share in the deed, a share in its doom; one ancestral curse hath ruined both of you.

ORESTES

Ah, sister mine! at last I see thee again only to be robbed in a moment of thy dear love; I must leave thee, and by thee be left.

DIOSCURI

Hers are a husband and a home; her only suffering this, that she is quitting Argos.

ORESTES

Yet what could call forth deeper grief than exile from one's fatherland? I must leave my father's house, and at a stranger's bar be sentenced for my mother's blood.

DIOSCURI

Be of good cheer; go to the holy town of Pallas; keep a stout heart only.

ELECTRA

O my brother, best and dearest! clasp me to thy breast; for now is the curse of our mother's blood cutting us off from the home of our fathers.

ORESTES

Throw thy arms in close embrace about me. Oh! weep as o'er my grave when I am dead.

DIOSCURI

Ah me! that bitter cry makes even gods shudder to hear. Yea, for in my breast and in every heavenly being's dwells pity for the sorrows of mankind.

ORESTES

Never to see thee more!

ELECTRA

Never again to stand within thy sight!

ORESTES

This is my last good-bye to thee.

ELECTRA

Farewell, farewell, my city! and ye my fellow-countrywomen, a long farewell to you!

ORESTES

Art thou going already, truest of thy sex?

ELECTRA

I go, the tear-drop dimming my tender eyes.

ORESTES

Go, Pylades, and be happy; take and wed Electra.

DIOSCURI

Their only thoughts will be their marriage; but haste thee to Athens, seeking to escape these hounds of hell, for they are on thy track in fearful wise, swart monsters, with snakes for hands, who reap a harvest of man's agony. But we twain must haste away o'er the Sicilian main to save the seaman's ship. Yet as we fly through heaven's expanse we help not the wicked; but whoso in his life loves piety and justice, all such we free from troublous toils and save. Wherefore let no man be minded to act unjustly, or with men foresworn set sail; such the warning I, a god, to mortals give.

(THE DIOSCURI *vanish.*)

CHORUS

Farewell! truly that mortal's is a happy lot, who can thus fare, unafflicted by any woe.

COLERIDGE's translation has been slightly modified in the following lines: 16, 57, 294, 295, 297, 298, 336, 338, 340, 369, 425, 523, 624, 648, 842, 904, 936, 1209, 1349, 1359.

1. *i.e.*, Pegasus.

2. Coleridge's note here, which explains in some measure the allusions in this choral ode, runs as follows: "The story was that Atreus and Thyestes, the sons of Pelops, being rival claimants to the throne of Mycenae, agreed that whichever should be able to exhibit some portent should be king. Now Atreus found a golden lamb among his flocks, and would have exhibited it, but Thyestes, by guilty collusion with his brother's wife Aerope, cheated him and produced the lamb as his. Accordingly he received the kingdom; but Atreus avenged himself by drowning his wife, and by killing the children of Thyestes and serving them up as food to their father, whom he then slew. Whereat Zeus reversed the whole order of nature, to make men suffer for these crimes."

3. *i.e.*, the Dioscuri.

4. It is interesting to note that Euripides adopts here the "Stesichorean" version of the story of Helen, which he treated at length in the *Helen*.

5. The reference is to the Peasant to whom Electra had been married.

XIV
ORESTES

Characters in the Play

Electra, *daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra*
Helen, *wife of* Menelaus
Chorus of Argive Maidens
Orestes, *brother of* Electra
Menelaus, *brother of Agamemnon; King of Argos*
Pylades, *friend of* Orestes
Messenger, *formerly servant of Agamemnon*
Hermione, *daughter of* Menelaus *and* Helen
A Phrygian Eunuch, *in* Helen's *retinue*
Apollo
Tyndareus, *father of Clytemnestra*
Attendants

INTRODUCTION

In 408 B.C., approximately five years after the composition of the *Electra,* Euripides returned to the same subject-matter and produced his *Orestes.* The play was apparently very popular in antiquity, in all probability because it contains a number of brilliant and exciting individual scenes. In its entirety it embodies a far different interpretation of the legendary material from the one submitted in the *Electra.* In the prologue we discover that the time of the action is on the sixth day after the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Orestes has lost his sanity and is being carefully nursed by his sister Electra. The scene itself is most effective, and Euripides in his portrayal of the half-crazed Orestes has produced the most notable study of abnormal psychological states which has come down to us from antiquity.

After this opening there follows a most amazing play, shot through with dramatic anachronism, sizzling melodrama, cold, formal debate, and palpable topical allusions. This agglomeration of relatively disparate elements is brought to an end in an extraordinary fashion. Orestes, Pylades, and Electra have been sentenced to death for the crime of matricide. In order to get revenge before they die, they attempt to kill Helen, who mysteriously vanishes, and so they turn to Helen's blameless daughter, Hermione. Orestes appears on the palace roof, holding a sword at Hermione's throat while Menelaus from below pleads with him to spare her life. In the meantime the palace has been set on fire by Pylades and Electra. In this hair-raising situation Apollo appears as a very timely *deus ex machina,* and forthwith puts all to rights. He directs Orestes to go to Athens that he may be purged of his guilt, and then to return and marry Hermione. Electra is to become the wife of Pylades, and peace is evidently in store for everyone.

Because of this happy ending, and because of other elements in the play which have been interpreted as comic (for example, the report given by the Phrygian Eunuch of Helen's mysterious disappearance), the *Orestes* has been considered by some critics to have been a substitute for a satyr-play. If this theory be accepted, it would have to be regarded as in the same general class of plays as the *Alcestis.* Other scholars have

urged that the drama throughout keeps its emphasis upon the mental instability of Orestes, and paints on the whole a repelling picture of all these characters who have become tainted by the curse upon the House of Atreus. Furthermore, they would maintain that there is implicit in the play more than a veiled attack on contemporary social and political evils. For example, Orestes' everlasting desire to discuss each issue as though it were a subject for a formal debate is seen as Euripides' indictment of the newer educational tendencies of the time. Likewise, such critics would argue that the playwright is protesting vigorously against the dangers of demagoguery when he describes the assembly which condemned Orestes. Those who hold this general view of the play are somewhat embarrassed by Apollo's appearance at the conclusion, and they have been compelled therefore to maintain that the final portion of the play is not genuine.

The very fact that critics have reached no general agreement in their interpretations inevitably forces us to conclude that Euripides has failed to fuse organically the various ingredients of his drama. What we seem to have in the *Orestes* is a vivid example of Euripides' characteristic strength and weakness. There can be no doubt that he possesses an uncanny sense of the dramatic potentialities of any particular scene, as many of the episodes of this play clearly testify, but on the other hand he is sadly wanting, at least here and in several other plays, in the ability to synthesize the individual scenes into a coherent dramatic whole. Perhaps in the *Orestes,* Euripides was satisfied to construct out of this old traditional material a series of thrilling and melodramatic episodes, and at the same time to make the old material his vehicle for expressing his strictures on the Athens of his day. If these constituted his major purposes, and if he desired also to have his play meet with popular success, he may not have been so deeply concerned with the problem of its total integration.

ORESTES

(SCENE:—*Before the royal palace at Argos. It is the sixth day after the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.* ELECTRA *is discovered alone.* ORESTES *lies sleeping on a couch in the background*)

ELECTRA

THERE is naught so terrible to describe, be it physical pain or heaven-sent affliction,[1] that man's nature may not have to bear the burden of it. Tantalus, they say, once so prosperous,—and I am not now taunting him with his misfortunes,—Tantalus, the reputed son of Zeus, hangs suspended in mid air, quailing at the crag which looms above his head; paying this penalty, they say, for the shameful weakness he displayed in failing to keep a bridle on his lips, when admitted by gods, though he was but a mortal, to share the honours of their feasts like one of them.

He it was that begat Pelops, the father of Atreus, for whom the goddess, when she had carded her wool, spun a web of strife, even to the making of war with his own brother Thyestes. But why need I repeat that hideous tale?

Well, Atreus slew Thyestes' children and feasted him on them; but,—passing over intermediate events,—from Atreus and Aerope of Crete sprang Agamemnon, that famous chief,—if his was really fame,—and Menelaus. Now it was this Menelaus who married Helen, Heaven's abhorrence; while his brother, King Agamemnon, took Clytemnestra to wife, name of note in Hellas, and we three daughters were his issue, Chrysothemis, Iphigenia, and myself Electra; also a son Orestes; all of that one accursed mother, who slew her lord, after snaring him in a robe that had no outlet. Her reason a maiden's lips may not declare, and so I leave that unexplained for the world to guess at. What need for me to charge Phoebus with wrong-doing, though he instigated Orestes to slay his own mother, a deed that few approved; still it was his obedience to the god that made him slay her; I, too, feebly as a woman would, shared in the deed of blood, as did Pylades who helped us to bring it about.

After this my poor Orestes fell sick of a cruel wasting disease; upon his

couch he lies prostrated, and it is his mother's blood that goads him into frenzied fits; this I say, from dread of naming those goddesses, whose terrors are chasing him before them,—even the Eumenides. 'Tis now the sixth day since the body of his murdered mother was committed to the cleansing fire; since then no food has passed his lips, nor hath he washed his skin; but wrapped in his cloak he weeps in his lucid moments, whenever the fever leaves him; otherwhiles he bounds headlong from his couch, as a colt when it is loosed from the yoke. Moreover, this city of Argos has decreed that no man give us shelter at his fireside or speak to matricides like us; yea, and this is the fateful day on which Argos will decide our sentence, whether we are both to die by stoning, or to whet the steel and plunge it in our necks. There is, 'tis true, one hope of escape still left us; Menelaus has landed from Troy; his fleet now crowds the haven of Nauplia where he is come to anchor, returned at last from Troy after ceaseless wanderings; but Helen, that "lady of sorrows," as she styles herself, hath he sent on to our palace, carefully waiting for the night, lest any of those parents whose sons were slain beneath the walls of Troy, might see her if she went by day, and set to stoning her. Within she sits, weeping for her sister and the calamities of her family, and yet *she* hath still some solace in her woe; for Hermione, the child she left at home in the hour she sailed for Troy,—the maid whom Menelaus brought from Sparta and entrusted to my mother's keeping,—is still a cause of joy to her and a reason to forget her sorrows.

I, meantime, am watching each approach, against the moment I see Menelaus arriving; for unless we find some safety there, we have but a feeble anchor to ride on otherwise.

A helpless thing, an unlucky house!

(HELEN *enters from the palace.*)

HELEN

Daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, hapless Electra, too long now left a maid unwed! how is it with thee and thy brother, this ill-starred Orestes who slew his mother! Speak; for referring the sin as I do to Phoebus, I incur no pollution by letting thee accost me; and yet I am truly sorry for the fate of my sister Clytemnestra, on whom I ne'er set eyes after I was driven by heaven-sent frenzy to sail on my disastrous voyage to Ilium; but now that I am parted from her I bewail our misfortunes.[2]

ELECTRA

Prithee, Helen, why should I speak of that which thine own eyes can see the son of Agamemnon in his misery?

Beside his wretched corpse I sit, a sleepless sentinel; for corpse he is, so faint his breath; not that I reproach him with his sufferings; but thou

art highly blest and thy husband too, and ye are come upon us in the hour of adversity.

HELEN

How long hath he been laid thus upon his couch?

ELECTRA

Ever since he spilt his mother's blood—.

HELEN

Unhappy wretch! unhappy mother! what a death she died!

ELECTRA

Unhappy enough to succumb to his misery.

HELEN

Prithee, maiden, wilt hear me a moment?

ELECTRA

Aye, with such small leisure as this watching o'er a brother leaves.

HELEN

Wilt go for me to my sister's tomb?

ELECTRA

Wouldst have me seek my mother's tomb? And why?

HELEN

To carry an offering of hair and a libation from me.

ELECTRA

Art forbidden then to go to the tombs of those thou lovest?

HELEN

Nay, but I am ashamed to show myself in Argos.

ELECTRA

A late repentance surely for one who left her home so shamefully then.

HELEN

Thou hast told the truth, but thy telling is not kind to me.

ELECTRA

What is this supposed modesty before the eyes of Mycenae that possesses thee?

HELEN

I am afraid of the fathers of those who lie dead beneath the walls of Ilium.

ELECTRA

Good cause for fear; thy name is on every tongue in Argos.

HELEN

Then free me of my fear and grant me this boon.

ELECTRA

I could not bear to face my mother's grave.

HELEN

And yet 'twere shame indeed to send these offerings by a servant's hand.

ELECTRA

Then why not send thy daughter Hermione?

HELEN

'Tis not seemly for a tender maid to make her way amongst a crowd.

ELECTRA

And yet she would thus be repaying her dead foster-mother's care.

HELEN

True; thou hast convinced me, maiden. Yes, I will send my daughter; for thou art right. (*Calling*) Hermione, my child, come forth before the palace; (HERMIONE *and attendants come out of the palace.*) take these libations and these tresses of mine in thy hands, and go pour round Clytemnestra's tomb a mingled cup of honey, milk, and frothing wine; then stand upon the heaped-up grave, and proclaim therefrom, "Helen, thy sister, sends thee these libations as her gift, fearing herself to approach thy tomb from terror of the Argive mob"; and bid her harbour kindly thoughts towards me and thee and my husband; towards these two wretched sufferers, too, whom Heaven hath afflicted. Likewise promise that I will pay in full whatever funeral gifts are due from me to a sister. Now go, my child, and tarry not; and soon as thou hast made the offering at the tomb, bethink thee of thy return.

(HELEN *goes into the palace as* HERMIONE *and her attendants depart with the offerings.*)

ELECTRA

O human nature, what a grievous curse thou art in this world! and what salvation, too, to those who have a goodly heritage therein!

Did ye mark how she cut off her hair only at the ends, careful to preserve its beauty? 'Tis the same woman as of old. May Heaven's hate pursue thee! for thou hast proved the ruin of me and my poor brother and all Hellas.

Alack! here are my friends once more, coming to unite their plaintive dirge with mine; they will soon put an end to my brother's peaceful sleep and cause my tears to flow when I see his frenzied fit.

(*The* CHORUS OF ARGIVE MAIDENS *enters quietly. The following lines between* ELECTRA *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

Good friends, step softly; not a sound; not a whisper! for though this kindness is well-meant, rouse him and I shall rue it.

CHORUS

Hush! hush! let your footsteps fall lightly! not a sound! not a whisper!

ELECTRA

Further, further from his couch! I beseech ye.

CHORUS

There! there! I obey.

ELECTRA

Hush! hush! good friend, I pray. Soft as the breath of slender reedy pipe be thy every accent!

CHORUS

Hark, how soft and low I drop my voice!

ELECTRA

Yes, lower thy voice e'en thus; approach now, softly, softly! Tell me what reason ye had for coming at all. 'Tis so long since he laid him down to sleep.

CHORUS

How is it with him? Impart thy news, dear lady. Is it weal or woe I am to tell?

ELECTRA

He is still alive, but his moans grow feeble.

CHORUS

What sayest thou? (*Turning to* ORESTES) Poor wretch!

ELECTRA

Awake him from the deep sweet slumber he is now enjoying and thou wilt cause his death.

CHORUS

Ah, poor sufferer! victim of Heaven's vengeful hate!

ELECTRA

Ah, misery! It seems it was a wicked utterance by a wicked god delivered, the day that Loxias from his seat upon the tripod of Themis decreed my mother's most unnatural murder.

CHORUS

He stirs beneath his robe! Dost see?

ELECTRA

Alas! I do; thy noisy words have roused him from his sleep.

CHORUS

Nay, methinks he slumbers still.

ELECTRA

Begone! quit the house! retrace thy footsteps! a truce to this din!

CHORUS

He sleeps. Thou art right.

ELECTRA

O Night, majestic queen, giver of sleep to toiling men, rise from the abyss of Erebus and wing thy way to the palace of Agamemnon! For beneath our load of misery and woe we sink, aye, sink oppressed. There! (*To the* CHORUS) that noise again! Be still and keep that high-pitched voice of thine away from his couch, suffer him to enjoy his sleep in peace!

CHORUS

Tell me, what end awaits his troubles?

ELECTRA

Death, death; what else? for he does not even miss his food.

CHORUS

Why, then his doom is full in view.

ELECTRA

Phoebus marked us out as his victims by imposing a foul unnatural task, even the shedding of the blood of our mother, who slew our sire.

CHORUS

'Twas just, but 'twas not well.

ELECTRA

Dead, dead, O mother mine! and thou hast slain a father and these the children of thy womb; for we are dead or as the dead. Yes,

thou art in thy grave, and more than half my life is spent in weeping and wailing and midnight lamentations; oh, look on me! a maid unwed, unblest with babes, I drag out a joyless existence as if for ever.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

My daughter Electra, from thy near station there see whether thy brother hath not passed away without thy knowing it; for I like not his utter prostration.

ORESTES (*awaking refreshed*)

Sweet charm of sleep! saviour in sickness! how dear to me thy coming was! how needed! All hail, majestic power, oblivion of woe! How wise this goddess is, how earnestly invoked by every suffering soul! (*Addressing* ELECTRA) Whence came I hither? How is it I am here? for I have lost all previous recollection and remember nothing.

ELECTRA

Dearest brother, how glad I was to see thee fall asleep! Wouldst have me take thee in my arms and lift thy body?

ORESTES

Take, oh! take me in thy arms, and from this sufferer's mouth and eyes wipe off the flakes of foam.

ELECTRA

Ah! 'tis a service I love; nor do I scorn with sister's hand to tend a brother's limbs.

ORESTES

Prop me up, thy side to mine; brush the matted hair from off my face, for I see but dimly.

ELECTRA

Ah, poor head! how squalid are thy locks become! How wild thy look from remaining so long uncleansed!

ORESTES

Lay me once more upon the couch; when my fit leaves me, I am all unnerved, unstrung.

ELECTRA (*as she lays him down*)

Welcome to the sick man is his couch, for painful though it be to take thereto, yet is it necessary.

ORESTES

Set me upright once again, turn me round; it is their helplessness makes the sick so hard to please.

ELECTRA

Wilt put thy feet upon the ground and take a step at last? Change is always pleasant.

ORESTES

That will I; for that has a semblance of health; and that seeming, though it be far from the reality, is preferable to this.

ELECTRA

Hear me then, O brother mine, while yet the avenging fiends permit thee to use thy senses.

ORESTES

Hast news to tell? so it be good, thou dost me a kindness, but if it tend to my hurt, lo! I have sorrow enough.

ELECTRA

Menelaus, thy father's brother, is arrived; in Nauplia his fleet lies at anchor.

ORESTES

Ha! is he come to cast a ray of light upon our gloom, a man of our own kin who owes our sire a debt of gratitude?

ELECTRA

Yes, he is come, and is bringing Helen with him from the walls of Troy; accept this as a sure proof of what I say.

ORESTES

Had he returned alone in safety, he were more to be envied; for if he is bringing his wife with him, he is bringing a load of evil.

ELECTRA

Tyndareus begat a race of daughters notorious for the shame they earned, infamous throughout Hellas.

ORESTES

Be thou then different from that evil brood, for well thou mayest, and that not only in profession, but also in heart.

ELECTRA

Ah! brother, thine eye is growing wild, and in a moment art thou passing from thy recent saneness back to frenzy.

ORESTES (*starting up wildly*)

Mother, I implore thee! let not loose on me those maidens with their bloodshot eyes and snaky hair. Ha! see, see where they approach to leap upon me!

ELECTRA

Lie still, poor sufferer, on thy couch; thine eye sees none of the things which thy fancy paints so clear.

ORESTES

O Phoebus! they will kill me, yon hounds of hell, death's priestesses with glaring eyes, terrific goddesses.

ELECTRA

I will not let thee go; but with arms twined round thee will prevent thy piteous tossing to and fro.

ORESTES

Loose me! thou art one of those fiends that plague me, and art gripping me by the waist to hurl my body into Tartarus.

ELECTRA

Woe is me! what succour can I find, seeing that we have Heaven's forces set against us?

ORESTES

Give me my horn-tipped bow, Apollo's gift, wherewith that god declared that I should defend myself against these goddesses, if ever they sought to scare me with wild transports of madness.

A mortal hand will wound one of these goddesses, unless she vanish from my sight. Do ye not heed me, or mark the feathered shaft of my far-shooting bow ready to wing its flight? What! do ye linger still? Spread your pinions, skim the sky, and blame those oracles of Phoebus.

Ah! why am I raving, panting, gasping? Whither, oh! whither have I leapt from off my couch? Once more the storm is past; I see a calm.

Sister, why weepest thou, thy head wrapped in thy robe? I am ashamed that I should make thee a partner in my sufferings and distress a maid like thee through sickness of mine. Cease to fret for my troubles; for though thou didst consent to it, yet 'twas I that spilt our mother's blood. 'Tis Loxias I blame, for urging me on to do a deed most damned, encouraging me with words but no real help; for I am sure that, had I asked my father to his face whether I was to slay my mother, he would have implored me oft and earnestly by this beard never to plunge a murderer's sword into my mother's breast, since he would not thereby regain his life, whilst I, poor wretch, should be doomed to drain this cup of sorrow.

E'en as it is, dear sister, unveil thy face and cease to weep, despite our abject misery; and whensoe'er thou seest me give way to despair, be it thine to calm and soothe the terrors and distorted fancies of my brain; likewise when sorrow comes to thee, I must be at thy side and give thee words of comfort; for to help our friends like this is a gracious task.

Seek thy chamber now, poor sister; lie down and close awhile thy sleepless eyes; take food and bathe thy body; for if thou leave me or fall sick from nursing me, my doom is sealed; for thou art the only champion I now have, by all the rest deserted, as thou seest.

ELECTRA

I leave thee! never! With thee I am resolved to live and die; for 'tis the same; if thou diest, what can I, a woman, do? How shall I escape alone, reft of brother, sire, and friends?

Still if it be thy pleasure, I must do thy bidding. But lay thee down upon thy couch, and pay not too great heed to the terrors and alarms that scare thee from thy rest; lie still upon thy pallet bed; for e'en though one be not sick but only fancy it, this is a source of weariness and perplexity to mortals.

(ELECTRA *enters the palace, as* ORESTES *lies back upon his couch.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Ah! ye goddesses terrific, swiftly careering on outspread pinions, whose lot it is 'mid tears and groans to hold revel not with Bacchic rites; ye avenging spirits swarthy-hued, that dart along the spacious firmament, exacting a penalty for blood, a penalty for murder, to you I make my suppliant prayer: suffer the son of Agamemnon to forget his wild whirling frenzy!

Ah, woe for the troublous task! which thou, poor wretch, didst strive to compass to thy ruin, listening to the voice prophetic, proclaimed aloud by Phoebus from the tripod throughout his sanctuary, where is a secret spot they call "the navel of the earth."

antistrophe

O Zeus! What pity will be shown? what deadly struggle is here at hand, hurrying thee on o'er thy path of woe, a victim on whom some fiend is heaping tribulation, by bringing on thy house thy mother's bloodshed which drives thee raving mad? I weep for thee, for thee I weep.

Great prosperity abideth not amongst mankind; but some power divine, shaking it to and fro like the sail of a swift galley, plunges it deep in the waves of grievous affliction, boisterous and deadly as the waves of the sea. For what new family am I henceforth to honour by preference other than that which sprung from a marriage divine, even from Tantalus?

Behold a king draws near, prince Menelaus! From his magnificence 'tis plain to see that he is a scion of the race of Tantalus.

All hail! thou that didst sail with a thousand ships to Asia's strand, and by Heaven's help accomplish all thy heart's desire, making good-fortune a friend to thyself.

(MENELAUS *and his retinue enter.*)

MENELAUS

All hail, my home! Some joy I feel on seeing thee again on my return from Troy, some sorrow too the sight recalls; for never yet have I beheld a house more closely encircled by the net of dire affliction.

Concerning Agamemnon's fate and the awful death he died at his wife's hands I learnt as I was trying to put in at Malea, when the sailors' seer from out the waves, unerring Glaucus, Nereus' spokesman, brought the news to me; for he stationed himself in full view by our ship and thus addressed me, "Yonder, Menelaus, lies thy brother slain, plunged in a fatal bath, the last his wife will ever give him"; filling high the cup of tears for me and my brave crew. Arrived at Nauplia, my wife already on the point of starting hither, I was dreaming of folding Orestes, Agamemnon's son, and his mother in a fond embrace, as if 'twere well with them, when I heard a mariner relate the murder of the daughter of Tyndareus. Tell me then, good girls, where to find the son of Agamemnon, the daring author of that fearful crime; for he was but a babe in Clytemnestra's arms that day I left my home to go to Troy, so that I should not recognize him, e'en were I to see him.

ORESTES (*staggering towards him from the couch*)

Behold the object of thy inquiry, Menelaus; this is Orestes. To thee will I of mine own accord relate my sufferings. But as the prelude to my speech I clasp thy knees in suppliant wise, seeking thus to tie to thee the prayer of lips that lack the suppliant's bough; save me, for thou art arrived at the very crisis of my trouble.

MENELAUS

Ye gods! what do I see? what death's-head greets my sight?

ORESTES

Thou art right; I *am* dead through misery, though I still gaze upon the sun.

MENELAUS

How wild the look thy unkempt hair gives thee, poor wretch!

ORESTES

'Tis not my looks, but my deeds that torture me.

MENELAUS

How terribly thy tearless eyeballs glare!

ORESTES

My body is vanished and gone, though my name hath not yet deserted me.

MENELAUS

Unsightly apparition, so different from what I expected!

ORESTES

In me behold a man that hath slain his hapless mother.

MENELAUS

I have heard all; be chary of thy tale of woe.

ORESTES

I will; but the deity is lavish of woe to me.

MENELAUS

What ails thee? what is thy deadly sickness?

ORESTES

My conscience; I know that I am guilty of an awful crime.

MENELAUS

Explain thyself; wisdom is shown in clearness, not in obscurity.

ORESTES

'Tis grief that is my chief complaint.

MENELAUS

True; she is a goddess dire; yet are there cures for her.

ORESTES

Mad transports too, and the vengeance due to a mother's blood.

MENELAUS

When did thy fit begin? which day was it?

ORESTES

On the day I was heaping the mound o'er my poor mother's grave.

MENELAUS

When thou wast in the house, or watching by the pyre?

ORESTES

As I was waiting by night to gather up her bones.

MENELAUS

Was any one else there to help thee rise?

ORESTES

Yes, Pylades who shared with me the bloody deed, my mother's murder.

MENELAUS

What phantom forms afflict thee thus?

ORESTES

Three maidens black as night I seem to see.

MENELAUS

I know of whom thou speakest, but I will not name them.

ORESTES

Do not; they are too dread; thou wert wise to avoid naming them.

MENELAUS

Are these the fiends that persecute thee with the curse of kindred blood?

ORESTES

Oh! the torment I endure from their hot pursuit!

MENELAUS

That they who have done an awful deed should be so done by is not strange.

ORESTES

Ah, well! I must have recourse in these troubles—

MENELAUS

Speak not of dying; that were folly.

ORESTES

To Phoebus, by whose command I shed my mother's blood.

MENELAUS

Showing a strange ignorance of what is fair and right.

ORESTES

We must obey the gods, whatever those gods are.

MENELAUS

Spite of all this doth not Loxias help thy affliction?

ORESTES

He will in time; to wait like this is the way with gods.

MENELAUS

How long is it since thy mother breathed her last?

ORESTES

This is now the sixth day; her funeral pyre is still warm.

MENELAUS

How soon the goddesses arrived to require thy mother's blood of thee!

ORESTES

To cleverness I lay no claim, but I was a true friend to friends.

MENELAUS

Does thy father afford thee any help at all?

ORESTES

Not as yet; and delaying to do so is, methinks, equivalent to not doing it.

MENELAUS

How dost thou stand towards the city after that deed of thine?

ORESTES

So hated am I that I cannot speak to any man.

MENELAUS

Have not thy hands been even cleansed of their blood-guiltiness, as the law requires?

ORESTES

No; for where'er I go, the door is shut against me.

MENELAUS

Which of the citizens drive thee from the land?

ORESTES

Oeax, who refers to my father his reason for hating Troy.

MENELAUS

I understand; he is visiting on thee the blood of Palamedes.

ORESTES

I at least had naught to do with that; yet am I utterly o'erthrown.

MENELAUS

Who else? some of the friends of Aegisthus perhaps?

ORESTES

Yes, they insult me, and the city listens to them now.

MENELAUS

Will it not suffer thee to keep the sceptre of Agamemnon?

ORESTES

How should it? seeing that they will not suffer me to remain alive.

MENELAUS

What is their method? canst thou tell me plainly?

ORESTES

To-day is sentence to be passed upon me.

MENELAUS

Exile, or death, or something else?

ORESTES

Death by stoning at the hands of the citizens.

MENELAUS

Then why not cross the frontier and fly?

ORESTES

Why not? because I am hemmed in by a ring of armed men.

MENELAUS

Private foes or Argive troops?

ORESTES

By all the citizens, to the end that I may die: 'tis shortly told.

MENELAUS

Poor wretch! thou hast arrived at the extremity of woe.

ORESTES

In thee I still have hopes of escape from my troubles. Yea, since fortune smiles upon thy coming, impart to thy less favoured friends some of thy prosperity, not reserving that luck exclusively for thyself; no! take thy turn too at suffering, and so pay back my father's kindness to those who have a claim on thee. For such friends as desert us in the hour of adversity, are friends in name but not in reality.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lo! Tyndareus, the Spartan, is making his way hither with the step of age, clad in black raiment, with his hair shorn short in mourning for his daughter.

ORESTES

Menelaus, I am ruined. See! Tyndareus approaches, the man of all others I most shrink from facing, because of the deed I have done; for he it was that nursed me when a babe, and lavished on me many a fond caress, carrying me about in his arms as the son of Agamemnon, and so did Leda; for they both regarded me as much as the Dioscuri.

Ah me! my wretched heart and soul! 'twas a sorry return I made them. What darkness can I find to veil my head? what cloud can I spread before me in my efforts to escape the old man's eye?

(TYNDAREUS *and his attendants enter.*)

TYNDAREUS

Where, where may I find Menelaus, my daughter's husband? for as I was pouring libations on Clytemnestra's grave I heard that he was come to Nauplia with his wife, safe home again after many a long year. Lead me to him; for I would fain stand at his right hand and give him greeting as a friend whom at last I see again.

MENELAUS

Hail, reverend father! rival of Zeus for a bride!

TYNDAREUS

All hail to thee! Menelaus, kinsman mine! Ha! (*Catching sight of* ORESTES) What an evil it is to be ignorant of the future! There lies that matricide before the house, a viper darting venom from his eyes, whom my soul abhors. What! Menelaus, speaking to a godless wretch like him?

MENELAUS

And why not? He is the son of one whom I loved well.

TYNDAREUS

This his son? this creature here?

MENELAUS

Yes, his son, and therefore worthy of respect, albeit in distress.

TYNDAREUS

Thou hast been so long amongst barbarians that thou art one of them.

MENELAUS

Always to respect one's kith and kin is a custom in Hellas.

TYNDAREUS

Aye, another custom is to yield a willing deference to the laws.

MENELAUS

The wise hold that everything which depends on necessity, is its slave.

TYNDAREUS

Keep that wisdom for thyself; I will not admit it.

MENELAUS

No, for thou art angry, and old age is not wise.

TYNDAREUS

What could a dispute about wisdom have to do with him? If right and wrong are clear to all, who was ever more senseless than this man, seeing that he never weighed the justice of the case, nor yet appealed to the universal law of Hellas? For when Agamemnon breathed his last beneath the blow my daughter dealt upon his head,—a deed most foul, which I will never defend,—he should have brought a charge against his mother and inflicted the penalty allowed by law for bloodshed, banishing her from his house; thus would he have gained the credit of forbearance from the calamity, keeping strictly to the law and showing his piety as well. As it is, he is come into the same misfortune as his mother; for though he had just cause for thinking her a wicked woman, he has surpassed her himself by murdering her. I will ask thee, Menelaus, just one question. Take this case: the wife of his bosom has slain him; *his* son follows suit and kills his mother in revenge; next the avenger's son to expiate this murder commits another; where, pray, will the chain of horrors end?

Our forefathers settled these matters the right way. They forbade any one with blood upon his hands to appear in their sight or cross their path; "purify him by exile," said they, "but no retaliation!" Otherwise there must always have been one who, by taking the pollution last upon his hands, would be liable to have his own blood shed.

For my part I abhor wicked women, especially my daughter who slew her husband; Helen, too, thy own wife, will I ne'er commend; no! I would not even speak to her, and little I envy thee a voyage to Troy for so worthless a woman. But the law will I defend with all my might, seeking to check this brutal spirit of murder, which is always the ruin of countries and cities alike. Wretch! (*Turning to* ORESTES) Hadst thou no heart when thy mother was baring her breast in her appeal to thee? True; I did not witness that awful deed, yet do my poor old eyes run down with tears. One thing at least attests the truth of what I say: thou art abhorred by Heaven, and this aimless wandering, these transports of

madness and terror are thy atonement for a mother's blood. What need have I of others to testify where I can see for myself? Take warning therefore, Menelaus, seek not to oppose the gods from any wish to help this wretch, but leave him to be stoned to death by his fellow-citizens; else set not foot on Sparta's soil. My daughter is dead, and she deserved her fate; but it should not have been his hand that slew her. In all except my daughters have I been a happy man; there my fortune stopped.

LEADER

His is an enviable lot, who is blest in his children, and does not find himself brought into evil notoriety.

ORESTES

I am afraid to speak before thee, aged prince in a matter where I am sure to grieve thee to the heart. Only let thy years, which frighten me from speaking, set no barrier in the path of my words, and I will go forward; but, as it is, I fear thy grey hairs. My crime is, I slew my mother; yet on another count this is no crime, being vengeance for my father. What ought I to have done? Set one thing against another. My father begat me; thy daughter gave me birth, being the field that received the seed from another; for without a sire no child would ever be born. So I reasoned thus: I ought to stand by the author of my being rather than the woman who undertook to rear me. Now thy daughter—*mother* I blush to call her—was engaged in secret intrigues with a lover (reviling her I shall revile myself; yet speak I will); Aegisthus was that stealthy paramour who lived with her; him I slew, and after him I sacrificed my mother,—a crime, no doubt, but done to avenge my father. Now, as regards the reasons for which I deserve to be stoned as thou threatenest, hear the service I am conferring on all Hellas. If women become so bold as to murder their husbands, taking refuge in their children, with the mother's breast to catch their pity, they would think naught of destroying their husbands on any plea whatsoever. But I, by a horrible crime—such is thy exaggerated phrase—have put an end to this custom. I hated my mother and had good cause to slay her. She was false to her husband when he was gone from his home to fight for all Hellas at the head of its armies, neither did she keep his honour undefiled; and when her sin had found her out, she wreaked no punishment upon herself, but, to avoid the vengeance of her lord, visited her sins on my father and slew him. By Heaven! ill time as it is for me to mention Heaven, when defending the cause of murder; still, suppose I had by my silence consented to my mother's conduct, what would the murdered man have done to me? Would he not now for very hate be tormenting me with avenging fiends? or are there goddesses to help my mother, and are there none to aid him

in his deeper wrong? Thou, yes! thou, old man, hast been my ruin by begetting a daughter so abandoned; for it was owing to her audacious deed that I lost my father and became my mother's murderer.

Attend, I say. Telemachus did not kill the wife of Odysseus; why? because she wedded not a second husband, but the marriage-bed remained untainted in her halls. Once more; Apollo, who makes the navel of the earth his home, vouchsafing unerring prophecies to man, the god whom we obey in all he saith,—'twas he to whom I hearkened when I slew my mother. Find him guilty of the crime, slay him; his was the sin, not mine. What ought I to have done? or is not the god competent to expiate the pollution when I refer it to him? Whither should one fly henceforth, if he will not rescue me from death after giving his commands? Say not then that the deed was badly done, but unfortunately for me who did it.

A blessed life those mortals lead who make wise marriages; but those who wed unhappily are alike unfortunate without and within their homes.

LEADER

'Tis ever woman's way to thwart men's fortunes to the increase of their sorrow.

TYNDAREUS

Since thou adoptest so bold a tone, suppressing naught, but answering me back in such wise that my heart is vexed within me, thou wilt incense me to go to greater lengths in procuring thy execution; and I shall regard this as a fine addition to my purpose in coming hither to deck my daughter's grave. Yes; I will go to the chosen council of Argos and set the citizens, whether they will or not, on thee and thy sister, that ye may suffer stoning. She deserves to die even more than thou, for it was she who embittered thee against thy mother by carrying tales to thine ear from time to time to whet thy hate the more announcing dreams from Agamemnon, and speaking of the amour with Aegisthus as an abomination to the gods in Hades, for even here on earth it was hateful, till she set the house ablaze with fires never kindled by Hephaestus. This I tell thee, Menelaus; and more,—I will perform it. If then thou makest my hatred or our connection of any account, seek not to avert this miscreant's doom in direct defiance of the gods, but leave him to be stoned to death by the citizens; else never set foot on Spartan soil. Remember thou hast been told all this, and choose not for friends the ungodly, excluding more righteous folk.

Ho! servants, lead me hence.

(TYNDAREUS *and his attendants depart.*)

ORESTES

Get thee gone! that the remainder of my speech may be addressed to Menelaus without interruption, free from the restrictions thy old age exerts.

Wherefore, Menelaus, art thou pacing round and round to think the matter over, up and down in thought perplexed?

MENELAUS

Let me alone! I am at a loss, as I turn it over in my mind, towards which side I am to lean.

ORESTES

Do not then decide finally, but after first hearing what I have to say, then make up thy mind.

MENELAUS

Good advice! say on. There are occasions when silence would be better than speech; there are others when the reverse holds good.

ORESTES

I will begin forthwith. A long statement has advantages over a short one and is more intelligible to hear. Give me nothing of thine own, Menelaus, but repay what thou didst thyself receive from my father. (*As* MENELAUS *makes a deprecating gesture*) 'Tis not goods I mean; save my life, and that is goods, the dearest I possess.

Say I am doing wrong. Well, I have a right to a little wrong-doing at thy hands to requite that wrong, for my father Agamemnon also did wrong in gathering the host of Hellas and going up against Ilium, not that he had sinned himself, but he was trying to find a cure for the sin and wrong-doing of thy wife. So this is one thing thou art bound to pay me back. For he had really sold his life to thee, a duty owed by friend to friend, toiling hard in the press of battle that so thou mightest win thy wife again. This is what thou didst receive at Troy; make me the same return. For one brief day exert thyself, not ten full years, on my behalf, standing up in my defence.

As for the loan paid to Aulis in the blood of my sister, I leave that to thy credit, not saying "Slay Hermione"; for in my present plight thou must needs have an advantage over me and I must let that pass. But grant my hapless sire this boon, my life and the life of her who has pined so long in maidenhood, my sister; for by my death I shall leave my father's house without an heir.

"Impossible!" thou'lt say. Why, there's the point of that old adage, "Friends are bound to succour friends in trouble." But when fortune giveth of her best, what need of friends? for God's help is enough of itself when he chooses to give it.

All Hellas credits thee with deep affection for thy wife—and I am not saying this with any subtle attempt at wheedling thee—by her I implore thee. (*As* MENELAUS *turns away*) Ah me, my misery! at what a pass have I arrived! what avails my wretched effort? Still, (*preparing to make a final appeal*) 'tis my whole family on whose behalf I am making this appeal! O my uncle, my father's own brother! imagine that the dead man in his grave is listening, that his spirit is hovering o'er thy head and speaking through my lips. I have said my say with reference to tears and groans and misfortunes, and I have begged my life—the aim of every man's endeavour, not of mine alone.

LEADER

I, too, weak woman though I am, beseech thee, as thou hast the power, succour those in need.

MENELAUS

Orestes, thou art a man for whom I have a deep regard, and I would fain help thee bear thy load of woe; yea, for it is a duty, too, to lend a kinsman such assistance by dying or slaying his enemies, provided Heaven grants the means. I only wish I had that power granted me by the gods; as it is, I have arrived destitute of allies, after my long weary wanderings, with such feeble succour as my surviving friends afford. As then we should never get the better of Pelasgian Argos by fighting, our hopes now rest on this, the chance of prevailing by persuasion; and we must try that, for how can you win a great cause by small efforts? it were senseless even to wish it. For when the people fall into a fury and their rage is still fresh, they are as hard to appease as a fierce fire is to quench; but if you gently slacken your hold and yield a little to their tension, cautiously watching your opportunity, they may possibly exhaust their power; and then as soon as they have spent their rage, thou mayest obtain whatever thou wilt from them without any trouble; for they have a natural sense of pity, and a hot temper too, an invaluable quality if you watch it closely. So I will go and try to persuade Tyndareus and the citizens to moderate their excessive anger against thee; for it is with them as with a ship; she dips if her sheet is hauled too taut, but rights herself again if it is let go.

Attempts to do too much are as keenly resented by the citizens as they are by the gods; and so it must be by cleverness, not by the force of superior numbers, I frankly tell thee, that I must try to save thee. No prowess of mine as perhaps thou fanciest, could do it; for, had it been so easy to triumph single-handed over the troubles that beset thee, I should never have tried to bring Argives over to the side of mercy; but, as it is, the wise find themselves forced to bow to fortune.

(MENELAUS *and his retinue depart*)

ORESTES

O thou that hast no use, save to head a host in a woman's cause! thou traitor in thy friends' defence! dost turn thy back on me? What Agamemnon did is all forgotten.

Ah, my father! thy friends, it seems, desert thee in adversity. Alas! I am betrayed; no longer have I any hope of finding a refuge where I may escape the death-sentence of Argos; for this man was my haven of safety.

Ha! a welcome sight, there comes Pylades, my best of friends, running hither from Phocis. A trusty comrade is a more cheering sight in trouble than a calm is to sailors.

(PYLADES *enters alone.*)

PYLADES

On my way hither I traversed the town with more haste than I need have used, to find thee and thy sister, having heard or rather myself seen the citizens assembling, under the belief that they intend your immediate execution. What is happening here? how is it with thee? how farest thou, my best of comrades, friends, and kin? for thou art all these to me.

ORESTES

Let one brief word declare to thee my evil case—it is "Ruin."

PYLADES

Include me then in it; for friends have all in common.

ORESTES

Menelaus is a traitor to me and my sister.

PYLADES

'Tis only natural that the husband of a traitress should prove a traitor.

ORESTES

He no more repaid me when he came than if he had never come.

PYLADES

Has he really arrived then in this land?

ORESTES

He was a long time coming, but very soon detected for all that in treachery to his friends.

PYLADES

And did he bring his wife, that queen of traitresses, with him on his ship?

ORESTES

It was not he who brought her, but she him.

PYLADES

Where is she who proved the ruin of so many Achaeans, though she was only a woman?

ORESTES

In my house; if, that is, I ought to call it mine.

PYLADES

And thou—what didst thou say to thy father's brother?

ORESTES

I besought him not to look on, while I and my sister were slain by the citizens.

PYLADES

By heaven! what said he to this? I fain would know.

ORESTES

Caution was the line he took—the usual policy of traitorous friends.

PYLADES

What excuse does he allege? when I have heard that, I know all.

ORESTES

The worthy sire arrived, who begat those peerless daughters.

PYLADES

Thou meanest Tyndareus; he was angry with thee, perhaps, for his daughter's sake.

ORESTES

Thou hast it; and Menelaus preferred his relationship to my father's.

PYLADES

Had he not courage enough to share thy troubles, when he *did* come?

ORESTES

Not he; he never was a warrior, though a doughty knight amongst women.

PYLADES

Thy case is desperate, it seems, and thou must die.

ORESTES

The citizens are to give their vote about us on the question of the murder.

PYLADES
And what is that to decide? tell me, for I am alarmed.

ORESTES
Our life or death; so short the words that tell of things so long!

PYLADES
Leave the palace, then, with thy sister and fly.

ORESTES
Look! we are being watched by guards on every side.

PYLADES
I saw that the streets of the city were secured with armed men.

ORESTES
We are as closely beleaguered as a city by its foes.

PYLADES
Ask me also of my state; for I too am ruined.

ORESTES
By whom? this would be a further sorrow to add to mine.

PYLADES
Strophius, my father, in a fit of anger, hath banished me his halls.

ORESTES
On some private charge, or one in which the citizens share?

PYLADES
He says it is a crime to have helped thee slay thy mother.

ORESTES
Woe is me! it seems my troubles will cause thee grief as well.

PYLADES
I am not like Menelaus; this must be endured.

ORESTES
Art thou not afraid that Argos will desire thy death as well as mine?

PYLADES
I am not theirs to punish; I belong to Phocis.

ORESTES
A terrible thing is the mob, when it has villains to lead it.

PYLADES

Aye, but with honest leaders its counsels are honest.

ORESTES

Go to; we must consult together.

PYLADES

What is it we must consider?

ORESTES

Suppose I go and tell the citizens—

PYLADES

That thy action was just—

ORESTES

In avenging my father?

PYLADES

I am afraid they will be glad enough to catch thee.

ORESTES

Well, am I to crouch in fear and die without a word?

PYLADES

That were cowardly.

ORESTES

How then shall I act?

PYLADES

Suppose thou stay here, what means of safety hast thou?

ORESTES

None.

PYLADES

And if thou go away, is there any hope of escaping thy troubles?

ORESTES

There might be possibly

PYLADES

Well, is not that better than staying?

ORESTES

Am I to go, then?

PYLADES

Yes; if thou *art* slain, there will be some honour in dying thus.

ORESTES

True; thus I escape cowardice.

PYLADES

Better than by staying.

ORESTES

After all, I can justify my action.

PYLADES

Pray that this may be the only view they take.

ORESTES

Some one or two maybe will pity me—

PYLADES

Yes, thy noble birth is a great point.

ORESTES

Resenting my father's death.

PYLADES

That is all quite clear.

ORESTES

I must go, for to die ignobly is a coward's part.

PYLADES

Well said!

ORESTES

Shall we tell my sister?

PYLADES

God forbid!

ORESTES

True, there might be tears.

PYLADES

Would not that be a grave omen?

ORESTES

Yes, silence is manifestly the better course.

PYLADES

Thou wilt thus gain time.

ORESTES

There is only one obstacle in my way,—

PYLADES

What fresh objection now?

ORESTES

I am afraid the goddesses will prevent me by madness.

PYLADES

Nay, but I will take care of thee.

ORESTES

A wretched task, to come in contact with a sick man.

PYLADES

That is not my view in thy case.

ORESTES

Beware of becoming a partner in my madness.

PYLADES

Let that pass!

ORESTES

Thou wilt not hesitate?

PYLADES

Not I; hesitation is a grave ill amongst friends.

ORESTES

On then, pilot of my course!

PYLADES

A service I am glad to render

ORESTES

And guide me to my father's tomb.

PYLADES

For what purpose?

ORESTES

That I may appeal to him to save me.

PYLADES

No doubt that is the proper way.

ORESTES

May I not even see my mother's grave!

PYLADES

No, she was an enemy. But hasten, supporting those limbs, so slow from sickness, on mine, that the decision of Argos may not catch thee first; for I will carry thee through the town, careless of the mob and unabashed. For how shall I prove my friendship if not by helping thee in sore distress?

ORESTES

Ah! the old saying again, "Get friends, not relations only." For a man whose soul is knit with thine, though he is not of thy kin, is better worth owning as a friend than a whole host of relations.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Long, long ago, by reason of an old misfortune to their house, the sons of Atreus saw the tide roll back from weal to woe, carrying with it their great prosperity and that prowess proudly vaunted through the length of Hellas and by the streams of Simois, on the day that strife found its way to the sons of Tantalus—that strife for a golden ram,[3] to end in bitter banqueting and the slaughter of high-born babes; and this is why a succession of murders committed by kinsmen never fails the twin Atreidae.

antistrophe

What seemed so right became so wrong, to cut a mother's skin with ruthless hand and show the bloodstained sword to the sun's bright beams; and yet her guilty deed was a piece of frantic wickedness and the folly of beings demented. Hapless daughter of Tyndareus! in terror of death she screamed to him, "My son, this is a crime, thy bold attempt upon thy mother's life; do not, whilst honouring thy father, fasten on thyself an eternity of shame." To stain the hand in a mother's blood!

epode

What affliction on earth surpasseth this? what calls for keener grief or pity? Oh! what an awful crime Agamemnon's son committed, ending in his raving madness, so that he is become a prey to the

avenging fiends for the murder, darting distracted glances round him! O the wretch! to have seen a mother's bosom o'er her robe of golden woof, and yet make her his victim, in recompense for his father's sufferings!

(ELECTRA *comes out of the palace.*)

ELECTRA

Surely, friends, my poor Orestes hath never left the house, mastered by the heaven-sent madness?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No; but he is gone to stand the trial appointed concerning his life before the Argive populace, in which it will be decided whether he and thou are to live or die.

ELECTRA

Oh! why did he do it? who persuaded him?

LEADER

Pylades; but this messenger, now close at hand, will no doubt tell us thy brother's fate at the trial.

(*A* MESSENGER, *formerly a servant of Agamemnon, enters.*)

MESSENGER

Woe is thee, unhappy daughter of our captain Agamemnon, my lady Electra! hearken to the sad tidings I bring thee.

ELECTRA

Alas! our fate is sealed; thy words show it; thou art clearly come with tidings of woe.

MESSENGER

To-day have the folk decided by vote that thou and thy brother are to die, poor lady.

ELECTRA

Alas! my expectation has come to pass; I have long feared this, and been wasting away in mourning for what was sure to happen. But come, old friend, describe the trial, and tell me what was said in the Argive assembly to condemn us and confirm our doom; is it stoning or the sword that is to cut short my existence? for I share my brother's misfortunes.

MESSENGER

I had just come from the country and was entering the gates, anxious to learn what was decided about thee and Orestes—for I was ever well-disposed to thy father, and it was thy house that fed and reared me, poor,

'tis true, yet loyal in the service of friends—when lo! I saw a crowd streaming to their seats on yonder height, where 'tis said Danaus first gathered his people and settled them in new homes, when he was paying the penalty to Aegyptus. So, when I saw them thronging together, I asked a citizen, "What news in Argos? Have tidings of hostilities ruffled the city of Danaus?" But he replied, "Dost thou not see the man Orestes on his way to be tried for his life?" Then I beheld an unexpected sight, which I would I ne'er had seen—Pylades and thy brother approaching together; the one with his head sunken on his breast, weakened by sickness; the other like a brother in the way he shared his friend's sorrow, tending his complaint with constant care.

Now when the Argives were fully gathered, a herald rose and asked, "Who wishes to give his opinion whether Orestes is to be slain or not for the murder of his mother?" Then up stood Talthybius, who helped thy father sack the Phrygians' city. He adopted a trimming tone, a mere tool of those in power as he always is, expressing high admiration for thy father, but saying not a word for thy brother, urging his crooked sentiments in specious words, to this effect: "it is not a good precedent he is establishing as regards parents," and all the while he had a pleasant look for the friends of Aegisthus. That is like the tribe of heralds; they always trip across to the lucky side; whoso hath influence in the city or a post in the government, he is the friend for them. After him prince Diomedes made harangue; not death but exile was the punishment he would have had them inflict on thee and thy brother, and so keep clear of guilt. Some murmured their assent, saying his words were good, but others disapproved.

Next stood up a fellow, who cannot close his lips; one whose impudence is his strength; an Argive, but not of Argos; [4] an alien forced on us; confident in bluster and licensed ignorance, and plausible enough to involve his hearers in some mischief sooner or later; for when a man with a pleasing trick of speech, but of unsound principles, persuades the mob, it is a serious evil to the state; whereas all who give sound and sensible advice on all occasions, if not immediately useful to the state, yet prove so afterwards. And this is the light in which to regard a party leader; for the position is much the same in the case of an orator and a man in office. This fellow was for stoning thee and Orestes to death, but it was Tyndareus who kept suggesting arguments of this kind to him as he urged the death of both of you.

Another then stood up, not fair to outward view perhaps but a brave man, rarely coming in contact with the town or the gatherings in the market-place; a yeoman, one of a class who form the only real support of our country; shrewd enough, and eager to grapple with the arguments; his character without a blemish, his walk in life beyond reproach. He

moved that they should crown Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, for showing his willingness to avenge a father in the blood of a wicked profligate who was preventing men from taking up arms and going on foreign service; "since," said he, "those, who remain behind, corrupt and seduce our wives left as keepers of our homes." To the better sort his words carried conviction; and no one rose to speak after him. So thy brother advanced and spoke. "Ye dwellers in the land of Inachus! Pelasgians in ancient times, and later Danai, I helped you no less than my father when I slew my mother; for if the murder of men by women is to be sanctioned, then the sooner you die, the better for you; otherwise you must needs become the slaves of women; and that will be doing the very reverse of what ye should. As it is, she who betrayed my father's honour has met her death, but if ye take my life, as is proposed, the strictness of the law becomes relaxed, and the sooner every one of you is dead, the better; for it will never be daring at any rate that they will lack." Yet, for all he seemed to speak so fair, he could not persuade the assembly; but that villain who spoke in favour of slaying thee and thy brother, gained his point by appealing to the mob.

Orestes, poor wretch, scarce prevailed on them to spare him death by stoning, promising to die by his own hand, and thou by thine, within the space of to-day; and Pylades is now bringing him from the conclave, weeping the while, and his friends bear him company, with tears and lamentation; so he cometh, a sad and piteous sight for thee to see. Make ready the sword, prepare the noose for thy neck, for thou must die; thy noble birth availed thee naught, nor Phoebus either from his seat on the tripod at Delphi; no! he was thy undoing.

(*The* MESSENGER *withdraws*)

LEADER

Ah, hapless maid! How dumb thou art, thy face veiled and bent upon the ground, as if ere long to start on a course of lamentation and wailing!

ELECTRA (*chanting*)

Land of Argos! I take up the dirge, doing bloody outrage on my cheek with pearly nail, and beating on my head, the meed of Persephone that fair young goddess of the nether world. Let the land of the Cyclops break forth into wailing for the sorrows of our house, laying the steel upon the head to crop it close. This is the piteous strain that goeth up for those who are doomed to perish, the chieftains once of Hellas.

Gone, gone and brought to naught is all the race of Pelops' sons! and with them the blessedness that crowned their happy home of yore; the wrath of God gat hold on them and that cruel murdering vote which prevails among the citizens.

Woe to you! ye tribes of short-lived men, full of tears and born to suffering, see how fate runs counter to your hopes! All in time's long march receive in turn their several troubles; and man throughout his life can never rest.

Oh! to reach that rock which hangs suspended midway 'twixt earth and heaven, that fragment from Olympus torn, which swings on chains of gold in ceaseless revolution, that I may utter my lament to Tantalus my forefather, who begat the ancestors of my house; these were witnesses of infatuate deeds when Pelops in four-horsed car drove winged steeds in hot pursuit along the sea, hurling the corpse of murdered Myrtilus into the heaving deep, after his race near the foam-flecked strand of Geraestus. From this came a woful curse upon my house, in the day that there appeared among the flocks of Atreus, breeder of horses, that baleful portent of a lamb with golden fleece, the creation of the son of Maia; for from it sprang a quarrel, which made the sun's winged steeds swerve from their course, turning them by a westward track along the sky towards the single horse of Dawn; and Zeus diverted the career of the seven Pleiads into a new path; yea, and it is that banquet to which Thyestes gave his name, and the guilty love of Cretan Aerope, the treacherous wife, that is requiting those murders with others; but the crowning woe is come on me and on my sire by reason of the bitter destinies of our house.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

See where thy brother comes, condemned to die, and with him Pylades, most loyal of friends, true as a brother, guiding the feeble steps of Orestes, as he paces carefully at his side.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter.*)

ELECTRA

Ah! brother mine, I weep to see thee stand before the tomb, face to face with the funeral pyre. Again that sigh escapes me, my senses leave me as I take my last fond look at thee.

ORESTES

Peace! an end to womanish lamenting! resign thyself to thy fate. True, 'tis a piteous end, but yet we needs must bear the present.

ELECTRA

How can I hold my peace, when we poor sufferers are no more to gaze upon the sun-god's light?

ORESTES

Oh! spare me *that* death! Enough that this unhappy wretch is already slain by Argives; forego our present sufferings.

ELECTRA

Alas for thy young life, Orestes! alas for the untimely death o'ertaking it! Thou shouldst have begun to live just as thou art dying.

ORESTES

Unman me not, I do adjure thee! bringing me to tears by the recollection of my sorrows.

ELECTRA

We are to die, and I cannot but bemoan our fate; for all men grieve to lose dear life.

ORESTES

This is the day appointed us; and we must fit the dangling noose about our necks or whet the sword for use.

ELECTRA

Be thou my executioner, brother, that no Argive may insult the child of Agamemnon and slay her

ORESTES

Enough that I have a mother's blood upon me; thee I will not slay; but die by any self-inflicted death thou wilt.

ELECTRA

Agreed; I will not be behind thee in using the sword; only I long to throw my arms about thy neck

ORESTES

Enjoy that idle satisfaction, if embraces have any joy for those who are come so nigh to death.

ELECTRA

Dear brother mine! bearer of a name that sounds most sweet in thy sister's ear, partner in one soul with her!

ORESTES

Oh! thou wilt melt my heart. I long to give thee back a fond embrace; and why should such a wretch as I feel any shame henceforth? (*Embracing* ELECTRA) Heart to heart, O sister mine! how sweet to me this close embrace! In place of wedded joys, in place of babes, this greeting is all that is possible to us in our misery.

ELECTRA

Ah, would the self-same sword, if only it might be, could slay us both, and one coffin of cedar-wood receive us!

ORESTES

That would be an end most sweet; but surely thou seest we are too destitute of friends to be allowed to share one tomb.

ELECTRA

Did not that coward Menelaus, that traitor to my father's memory, even speak for thee, making an effort to save thy life?

ORESTES

He did not so much as show himself, but having his hopes centred on the throne he was more cautious than to attempt the rescue of relatives. Ah! well, let us take care to quit ourselves gallantly and die as most befits the children of Agamemnon. I, for my part, will let this city see my noble spirit when I plunge the sword to my heart, and thou, for thine, must imitate my brave example. Do thou, Pylades, stand umpire to our bloody feat, and, when we both are dead, lay out our bodies decently; then carry them to our father's grave and bury us there with him. Farewell now; I go to do the deed, as thou seest.

PYLADES

Stay a moment; there is first one point I have to blame thee for, if thou thinkest I care to live when thou art dead.

ORESTES

But why art thou called on to die with me?

PYLADES

Canst ask? What is life to me with thee my comrade gone?

ORESTES

Thou didst not slay thy mother, as I did to my sorrow.

PYLADES

At least I helped thee; and so I ought to suffer alike.

ORESTES

Surrender to thy father; and seek not to die with me. Thou hast still a city, while I no longer have; thou hast still thy father's home, and mighty stores of wealth; and though thou art disappointed in thy marriage with my poor sister, whom I betrothed to thee from a deep regard for thy fellowship, yet choose thee another bride and rear a family; for the tie which bound us binds no more. Fare thee well, my comrade fondly

called; for us such faring cannot be, for thee perhaps; for we that are as dead are robbed of joy henceforth.

PYLADES

How far thou art from grasping what I mean! Oh! may the fruitful earth, the radiant sky refuse to hold my blood, if ever I turn traitor and desert thee when I have cleared myself; for I not only shared in the murder, which I will not disown, but also schemed the whole plot for which thou art now paying the penalty; wherefore I ought also to die as much as thou or she; for I consider her, whose hand thou didst promise me, as my wife. What specious tale shall I ever tell, when I reach Delphi, the citadel of Phocis? I who, before your misfortunes came, was so close a friend, but ceased to be, when thou wert unlucky. That must not be; no! this is my business too. But since we are to die, let us take counsel together that Menelaus may share our misfortune.

ORESTES

Best of friends! if only I could see this ere I die!

PYLADES

Hearken then, and defer awhile the fatal stroke.

ORESTES

I will wait in the hope of avenging me of my foe.

PYLADES

Hush! I have small confidence in women.

ORESTES

Have no fear of these; for they are our friends who are here.

PYLADES

Let us kill Helen, a bitter grief to Menelaus.

ORESTES

How? I am ready enough, if there is any chance of success.

PYLADES

With our swords; she is hiding in thy house.

ORESTES

Aye, that she is, and already she is putting her seal on everything

PYLADES

She shall do so no more, after she is wedded to Hades.

ORESTES

Impossible! she has her barbarian attendants.

PYLADES

Barbarians indeed! I am not the man to fear any Phrygian.

ORESTES

Creatures only fit to look after mirrors and unguents!

PYLADES

What! has she brought Trojan effeminacy with her here?

ORESTES

So much so that Hellas is become too small for her to live in.

PYLADES

The race of slaves is no match for free-born men

ORESTES

Well, if I can do this deed, I fear not death twice over.

PYLADES

No, nor I either, if it is thee I am avenging.

ORESTES

Declare the matter and tell me what thou proposest

PYLADES

We will enter the house on the pretence of going to our death.

ORESTES

So far I follow thee, but not beyond.

PYLADES

We will begin bewailing our sufferings to her.

ORESTES

Aye, so that she will shed tears, although her heart is glad.

PYLADES

And we shall then be in the same predicament as she.

ORESTES

How shall we proceed next in the enterprise?

PYLADES

We shall have swords concealed in our cloaks.

ORESTES

But, before attacking her, how are we to kill her attendants?

PYLADES

We will shut them up in different parts of the house.

ORESTES

And whoever refuses to be quiet, we must kill.

PYLADES

That done, our very deed shows us to what we must direct our efforts.

ORESTES

To Helen's slaughter; I understand that watchword.

PYLADES

Thou hast it, now hear how sound my scheme is; if we had drawn the sword upon a woman of greater chastity,[5] it would have been foul murder; but, as it is, she will be punished for the sake of all Hellas, whose sires she slew; while those whose children she destroyed, whose wives she widowed, will shout aloud for joy and kindle the altars of the gods, invoking on our heads a thousand blessings, because we shed this wicked woman's blood; for after killing her, thy name shall no more be "the matricide," but, resigning that title, thou shalt succeed to a better and be called "the slayer of Helen the murderess." It can never, never be right that Menelaus should prosper, and thy father, thy sister and thou be put to death, and thy mother too—(but I pass that by, for it is not seemly to mention it); —while he possesses thy home, though it was by Agamemnon's prowess that he regained his wife. May I perish then, if I draw not my sword upon her! But if after all we fail to compass Helen's death, we will fire the palace and die; for we will not fail to achieve one distinction, be it an honourable death or an honourable escape therefrom.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The daughter of Tyndareus, who has brought shame on her sex, has justly earned the hate of every woman.

ORESTES

Ah! there is nothing better than a trusty friend, neither wealth nor princely power; mere number is a senseless thing to set off against a noble friend. Such art thou, for thou didst not only devise the vengeance we took on Aegisthus, but didst stand by me at the gates of danger, and now again thou art offering me a means to punish my foes and dost not stand aloof thyself; but I will cease praising thee, for there is something wearisome even in being praised to excess. Now since in any case I must breathe my

last, I would fain my death should do my foes some hurt, that I may requite with ruin those who betrayed me, and that they too who made me suffer may taste of sorrow. Lo! I am the son of that Agamemnon, who was counted worthy to rule Hellas, exerting no tyrant's power but yet possessed of almost god-like might; him will I not disgrace by submitting to die like a slave; no! my last breath shall be free and I will avenge me on Menelaus. For could we but secure one object we should be lucky, if from some unexpected quarter a means of safety should arise and we be the slayers, not the slain; this is what I pray for; for this wish of mine is a pleasant dream to cheer the heart, without cost, by means of the tongue's winged utterances.

ELECTRA

Why, brother, I have it! a means of safety, first for thee, then for him, and thirdly for myself.

ORESTES

Divine providence, I suppose. But what use in suggesting that? seeing that I know the natural shrewdness of thy heart.

ELECTRA

Hearken a moment; (*to* PYLADES) do thou likewise attend.

ORESTES

Say on; the prospect of hearing good news affords a certain pleasure.

ELECTRA

Thou knowest Helen's daughter? of course thou must.

ORESTES

Hermione, whom my own mother reared,—know her? yes.

ELECTRA

She hath gone to Clytemnestra's grave.

ORESTES

With what intent? What hope art thou hinting at?

ELECTRA

Her purpose was to pour a libation over the tomb of our mother.

ORESTES

Well, granting that, how does this which thou hast mentioned conduce to our safety?

ELECTRA

Seize her as a hostage on her way back.

ORESTES

What good can thy suggested remedy do us three friends?

ELECTRA

If, after Helen's slaughter, Menelaus does anything to thee or to Pylades and me,—for we three friends are wholly one,—say thou wilt slay Hermione; then draw thy sword and keep it at the maiden's throat. If Menelaus, when he sees Helen weltering in her blood, tries to save thee to insure his daughter's life, allow him to take his child to his father's arms; but if he makes no effort to curb the angry outburst and leaves thee to die, then do thou plunge thy sword in his daughter's throat. Methinks, though he show himself violent at first, he will gradually grow milder; for he is not naturally bold or brave. That is the tower of defence I have for us, and now my tale is told.

ORESTES

O thou that hast the spirit of a man, though thy body clearly shows thee a tender woman, how far more worthy thou to live than die! This, Pylades, is the peerless woman thou wilt lose to thy sorrow, or, shouldst thou live, wilt marry to thy joy!

PYLADES

Then may I live and may she be brought to the capital of Phocis with all the honours of a happy marriage!

ORESTES

How soon will Hermione return to the palace? All else thou saidst was well, if only we are lucky in catching the villain's child.

ELECTRA

I expect she is near the house already, for the time agrees exactly.

ORESTES

'Tis well. Plant thyself before the palace, Electra my sister, and await the maid's approach; keep watch in case any one, an ally maybe or my father's brother, forestall us by his entry, ere the bloody deed is completed; and then make a signal to be heard inside the house, either by beating on a panel of the door or calling to us within.

Let us enter now, Pylades, and arm ourselves for the final struggle, for thou art the comrade that sharest the enterprise with me. Hearken! father, in thy home of darkest gloom! it is thy son Orestes who is calling thee to come to the rescue of the destitute; it is on thy account I am unjustly suffering woe, and it is by thy brother that I have been betrayed for practising justice; wherefore I would fain take and slay his wife; and do thou help us compass this.

ELECTRA

Oh! come, my father, come! if within the ground thou hearest the cry of thy children, who for thy sake are dying.

PYLADES

Hear my prayer too, Agamemnon, kinsman of my father, and save thy children.

ORESTES

I slew my mother,—

PYLADES

I held the sword—

ELECTRA

'Twas I that urged them on and set them free from fear—

ORESTES

All to succour thee, my sire.

ELECTRA

I proved no traitress either.

PYLADES

Wilt thou not hearken then to these reproaches and save thy children?

ORESTES

With tears I pour thee a libation.

ELECTRA

And I with notes of woe

PYLADES

Cease, and let us about our business. If prayers do really penetrate the ground, he hears. O Zeus, god of my fathers, O Justice, queen revered, vouchsafe us three success; three friends are we, but one the struggle, one the forfeit all must pay, to live or die.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter the palace. The following lines between* ELECTRA *and the* CHORUS *are chanted.*)

ELECTRA

My own townswomen, of foremost rank in Argos, the home of the Pelasgi!

CHORUS

Mistress, why dost thou address us? for still this honoured name is left thee in the Danaid town.

ELECTRA

Station yourselves, some here along the high road, others yonder on some other path, to watch the house.

CHORUS

But why dost thou summon me to this service? tell me, dear mistress.

ELECTRA

I am afraid that some one, who is stationed at the house for a bloody purpose, may cause troubles, only to find them himself.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Lead on; let us hasten; I will keep careful watch upon this track towards the east.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

And I on this, that leadeth westward. Throw a glance sideways, letting the eye range from point to point; then look back again.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

We are directing them as thou biddest.

ELECTRA

Cast your eyes around, let them peer in every direction through your tresses.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Who is that on the road? Who is yonder countryman I see wandering round thy house?

ELECTRA

Ah! friends, we are undone; he will at once reveal to our enemies the armed ambush of that lion-like pair.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*reconnoitring*)

Calm thy fears; the road is not occupied, as thou thinkest, dear mistress.

ELECTRA (*turning to the other watchers*)

And can I count thy side safe still? reassure me; is yonder space before the court-yard still deserted?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

All goes well here; look to thy own watch, for no Argive is approaching us.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Thy report agrees with mine; there is no noise here either.

ELECTRA

Well then, let me make myself heard in the gateway. (*Calling through the door*) Why are ye within the house delaying to spill your victim's blood, now that all is quiet? They do not hear; ah, woe is me! Can it be that their swords have lost their edge at the sight of her beauty? Soon will some mail-clad Argive, hurrying to her rescue, attack the palace. Keep a better look-out; 'tis no time for sitting still; bestir yourselves, some here, some there.

CHORUS

My eye is ranging to and fro all along the road.

HELEN (*within*)

Help, Pelasgian Argos! I am being foully murdered.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Heard ye that? Those men are now about the bloody deed.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

'Tis Helen screaming, so it seems.

ELECTRA

Come, eternal might of Zeus, oh, come to help my friends!

HELEN (*within*)

Menelaus, I am being murdered, but thou, though near, affordest me no aid.

ELECTRA

Cut, stab, and kill; all eager for the fray dart out your swords, double-handed, double-edged, against the woman who left her father's home and husband's side, and did to death so many of the men of Hellas, slain beside the river-bank, where tears rained down beneath the iron darts all round Scamander's eddying tides.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hush! hush! I caught the sound of a foot-fall on the road near the house.

ELECTRA

Ladies, my dearest friends, it is Hermione advancing into the midst of the bloodshed. Let our clamour cease; on she comes headlong into the meshes of the net. Fair will the quarry prove if caught. Resume your

station, looks composed and faces not betraying what has happened; and I too will wear a look of melancholy, as if forsooth I knew nothing of that desperate deed. (HERMIONE *enters.*) Ah! maiden, hast thou come from wreathing Clytemnestra's grave and from pouring libations to the dead?

HERMIONE

Yes, I have returned after securing a gracious recognition; but I was filled with some alarm as to the import of a cry I heard in the palace as I was still at a distance.

ELECTRA

But why? Our present lot gives cause for groans.

HERMIONE

Hush! What is thy news?

ELECTRA

Argos has sentenced Orestes and myself to death.

HERMIONE

Kinsfolk of my own! God forbid!

ELECTRA

It is decreed; the yoke of necessity is on our necks.

HERMIONE

Was this the reason then of the cry within?

ELECTRA

Yes, 'twas the cry of the suppliant as he fell at Helen's knees.

HERMIONE

Who is he? I am none the wiser, if thou tell me not.

ELECTRA

Orestes the hapless, entreating mercy for himself and me.

HERMIONE

Good reason then has the house to cry out.

ELECTRA

What else would make a man entreat more earnestly? Come, throw thyself before thy mother in her proud prosperity, and join thy friends in beseeching Menelaus not to look on and see us die. O thou that wert nursed in the same mother's arms as I, have pity on us and relieve our pain. Come hither to the struggle, and I myself will be thy guide; for thou and thou alone, hast the issue of our safety in thy hands.

HERMIONE

Behold me hastening to the house; as far as rests with me, regard yourselves as safe.

(HERMIONE *enters the palace.*)

ELECTRA

Now, friends, secure the prey in your armed ambush in the house.

HERMIONE (*calling from within*)

Ah! who are these I see?

ORESTES (*within*)

Silence! 'tis our safety, not thine, thou art here to insure.

ELECTRA

Hold her hard and fast; point a sword at her throat; then wait in silence, that Menelaus may learn that they are men, not Phrygian cowards, whom he has found and treated as only cowards deserve.

(*She enters the palace.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

What ho! my comrades, raise a din, a din and shouting before the house, that the murder done may not inspire the Argives with wild alarm, to make them bring aid to the royal palace, before I see for certain whether Helen's corpse lies weltering in the house or hear the news from one of her attendants; for I know but a part of the tragedy, of the rest I am not sure. Thanks to Justice the wrath of God has come on Helen; for she filled all Hellas with tears because of her accursed paramour, Paris of Ida, who took our countrymen to Troy.

But the bolts of the palace-doors rattle; be silent; for one of her Phrygians is coming out, from whom we will inquire how it is within.

(*The* PHRYGIAN EUNUCH *enters from the palace. The following lines between the* CHORUS *and the* PHRYGIAN *are sung or chanted*)

PHRYGIAN (*expressing the most abject terror*)

From death escaped, in my barbaric slippers have I fled away, away from the Argive sword, escaping as best a barbarian might by clambering over the cedar beams that roof the porch and through the Doric triglyphs. (O my country, my country!) Alack, alack! oh! whither can I fly, ye foreign dames, winging my way through the clear bright sky or over the sea, whose circle hornèd Ocean draws, as he girdles the world in his embrace?

CHORUS

What news, slave of Helen, creature from Ida?

PHRYGIAN

Ah me for Ilium, for Ilium, the city of Phrygia, and for Ida's holy hill with fruitful soil! in foreign accents hear me raise a plaintive strain over thee, whose ruin luckless Helen caused,—that lovely child whom Leda bore to a feathered swan, to be a curse to Apollo's towers of polished stone. Ah! well-a-day! woe to Dardania for the wailings wrung from it by the steeds that bought his minion Ganymede for Zeus.

CHORUS

Tell us plainly exactly what happened in the house, for till now I have been guessing at what I do not clearly understand.

PHRYGIAN

"Ah, for Linus! woe is him!" That is what barbarians say in their eastern tongue as a prelude to the dirge of death, whene'er royal blood is spilt upon the ground by deadly iron blades.

To tell thee exactly what happened: there came into the palace two lion-like men of Hellas, twins in nature; your famous chief was sire of one, 'twas said; the other was the son of Strophius; a crafty knave was he, like to Odysseus, subtle, silent, but staunch to his friends, daring enough for any valiant deed, versed in war and blood-thirsty as a serpent. Ruin seize him for his quiet plotting, the villain!

In they came, their eyes bedimmed with tears, and took their seats in all humility near the chair of the lady whom Paris the archer once wedded, one on this side, one on that, to right and left, with weapons on them; and both threw their suppliant arms round the knees of Helen; whereon her Phrygian servants started to their feet in wild alarm, each in his terror calling to his fellow, "Beware of treachery!" To some there seemed no cause, but others thought that the viper who had slain his mother, was entangling the daughter of Tyndareus in the toils of his snare.

CHORUS

And where wert thou the while? fled long before in terror?

PHRYGIAN

It happened that I, in Phrygian style, was wafting the breeze past Helen's curls with a round feather-fan, stationed before her face; and she the while, as eastern ladies use, was twisting flax on her distaff with her fingers, but letting her yarn fall on the floor, for she was

minded to embroider purple raiment as an offering from the Trojan spoils, a gift for Clytemnestra at her tomb.

Then to the Spartan maid Orestes spake, "Daughter of Zeus, quit thy chair and cross the floor to a seat at the old altar of Pelops, our ancestor, to hear something I have to say." Therewith he led the way and she followed, little guessing his designs. Meantime his accomplice, the Phocian miscreant, was off on other business. "Out of my way! Well, Phrygians always were cowards." So he shut them up in different parts of the house, some in the stables, others in private chambers, one here, one there, disposing of them severally at a distance from their mistress.

CHORUS

What happened next?

PHRYGIAN

Mother of Ida, mighty parent! Oh! the murderous scenes and lawless wickedness that I witnessed in the royal palace! They drew forth swords from under their purple cloaks, each darting his eye all round him in either direction to see that none was near, and then, like boars that range the hills, they stood at bay before her, crying, "Thou must die; it is thy craven husband that will slay thee, because he betrayed his brother's son to death in Argos." But she with piercing screams brought down her snow-white arm upon her bosom and loudly smote on her poor head; then turned her steps in flight, shod in her golden shoon; but Orestes, outstripping her slippered feet, clutched his fingers in her hair and bending back her neck on to her left shoulder was on the point of driving the grim steel into her throat.

CHORUS

Where were those Phrygians in the house to help her then?

PHRYGIAN

With a loud cry we battered down the doors and doorposts of the rooms we had been penned in, by means of bars, and ran to her assistance from every direction, one arming himself with stones, another with javelins, a third having a drawn sword; but Pylades came to meet us, all undaunted, like Hector of Troy or Ajax triple-plumed, as I saw him on the threshold of Priam's palace; and we met point to point. But then it became most manifest how inferior we Phrygians were to the warriors of Hellas in martial prowess. There was one man flying, another slain, a third wounded, yet another craving mercy to stave off death; but we escaped under cover of the darkness; while some were falling, others staggering, and some laid low

in death. And just as her unhappy mother sunk to the ground to die, came luckless Hermione to the palace; whereon those twain, like Bacchanals when they drop their wands and seize a mountain-cub, rushed and seized her; then turned again to the daughter of Zeus to slay her; but lo! she had vanished from the room, passing right through the house by magic spells or wizards' arts or heavenly fraud; O Zeus and earth, O day and night!

What happened afterwards I know not, for I stole out of the palace and ran away. So Menelaus went through all his toil and trouble to recover his wife Helen from Troy to no purpose.

(ORESTES *comes out of the palace.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Behold another strange sight succeeding its predecessors; I see Orestes sword in hand before the palace, advancing with excited steps.

ORESTES

Where is he who fled from the palace to escape my sword?

PHRYGIAN (*falling at the feet of* ORESTES)

Before thee I prostrate myself, O prince, and do obeisance in my foreign way.

ORESTES

'Tis not Ilium that is now the scene, but the land of Argos.

PHRYGIAN

No matter where, the wise love life more than death.

ORESTES

I suppose that shouting of thine was not for Menelaus to come to the rescue?

PHRYGIAN

Oh no! it was to help thee I called out, for thou art more deserving.

ORESTES

Was it a just fate that overtook the daughter of Tyndareus?

PHRYGIAN

Most just, though she had had three throats to die with.

ORESTES

Thy cowardice makes thee glib; these are not thy real sentiments.

PHRYGIAN

Why, surely she deserved it for the havoc she made of Hellas as well as Troy?

ORESTES

Swear thou art not saying this to humour me, or I will slay thee.

PHRYGIAN

By my life I swear,—an oath likely to be true in my case.

ORESTES

Did every Phrygian in Troy show the same terror of steel as thou dost?

PHRYGIAN

Oh, take thy sword away! held so near it throws a horrid gleam of blood.

ORESTES

Art thou afraid of being turned to a stone, as if it were a Gorgon thou seest?

PHRYGIAN

To a stone, no! but to a corpse; that Gorgon's head is not within my ken.

ORESTES

A slave, and so fearful of death, which will release thee from trouble!

PHRYGIAN

Bond or free, every one is glad to gaze upon the light.

ORESTES

Well said! thy shrewdness saves thee; go within.

PHRYGIAN

Thou wilt not kill me after all?

ORESTES

Thou art spared!

PHRYGIAN

O gracious words!

ORESTES

Come, I shall change my mind—

PHRYGIAN

Ill-omened utterance!

ORESTES

Thou fool! dost think I could endure to plunge my sword in throat of thine, thou that neither art woman nor amongst men hast any place? The reason I left the palace was to gag thy noisy tongue; for Argos is quickly roused, once it hears a cry to the rescue. As for Menelaus, we are not afraid of measuring swords with him; no! he may go upon his way proud of the golden ringlets on his shoulders; for if, to avenge the slaying of Helen, he gathers the Argives and leads them against the palace, refusing to attempt the rescue of me, my sister, and Pylades my fellow-conspirator, he shall have two corpses to behold, his daughter's as well as his wife's.

(*The* PHRYGIAN *departs as* ORESTES *re-enters the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ah! fortune, fortune! again and yet again the house is entering on a fearful contest for the race of Atreus.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*chanting*)

What are we to do? carry tidings to the town, or hold our peace?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*chanting*)

It is safer to keep silence, friends.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*chanting*)

Look, look at that sudden rush of smoke to the sky in front of the palace, telling its tale in advance!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*chanting*)

They are kindling torches to fire the halls of Tantalus; they do not shrink even from murder.

CHORUS (*singing*)

God holds the issue in his hand, to give to mortal men what end he will. Some mighty power is his; it was through a vengeful fiend that this family started on its career of murder, by hurling Myrtilus from the chariot.

But lo! I see Menelaus approaching the palace in hot haste; no doubt he has heard what is happening here. What ho! within, descendants of Atreus, make haste and secure the doors with bars. A man in luck is a dangerous adversary for luckless wretches like thyself, Orestes.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *appear on the roof, holding* HERMIONE. MENELAUS *and his attendants enter.*)

MENELAUS

Strange news of violent deeds done by a pair of savages,—men I do not call them,—has brought me hither. What I heard was that my wife was not killed after all, but had vanished out of sight,—an idle rumour doubtless, brought to me by some dupe of his own terror; a ruse perhaps of the matricide to turn the laugh against me.

Throw wide the palace doors! My orders to my servants are that they force the doors, that I may rescue my child at any rate from the hands of the murderers and recover my poor wife's corpse, that dear partner whose slayers must die with her by my arm.

ORESTES (*from the roof*)

Ho, fellow! Keep thy fingers off those bolts, thou Menelaus, who vauntest thyself so high; else will I tear off the ancient parapet, the work of masons, and shatter thy skull with this coping-stone. The doors are bolted and barred, which will prevent thy entrance to the palace and thy eagerness to bring aid.

MENELAUS

Ha! what now? I see a blaze of torches and men standing at bay on the house-top yonder, with a sword held at my daughter's throat.

ORESTES

Wouldst question me or hear me speak?

MENELAUS

Neither; but I suppose I *must* hear thee.

ORESTES

Well, if thou art anxious to know, I intend to slay thy daughter.

MENELAUS

After slaying Helen, art thou bent on adding another murder?

ORESTES

I would I had compassed that, instead of being duped by the gods!

MENELAUS

Dost thou deny having slain her, saying this out of wanton insult?

ORESTES

Yes, I do deny it to my sorrow. Would God—

MENELAUS

Would God—what? Thou provokest my fears.

ORESTES

I had hurled to Hades the pollution of Hellas!

MENELAUS

Surrender my wife's dead body, that I may bury her.

ORESTES

Ask the gods for her; but thy daughter I will slay.

MENELAUS

This matricide is bent on adding murder to murder.

ORESTES

This champion of his sire, betrayed by thee to death.

MENELAUS

Art thou not content with the stain of the mother's blood which is on thee?

ORESTES

I should not grow tired if I had these wicked women to slay for ever.

MENELAUS

Art thou too, Pylades, a partner in this bloody work?

ORESTES

His silence says he is; so my saying it will suffice.

MENELAUS

Not without thy ruing it, unless thou take wings and fly.

ORESTES

Fly we never will, but will fire the palace.

MENELAUS

What! wilt thou destroy the home of thy ancestors?

ORESTES

To prevent thee getting it I will, offering this maid in sacrifice upon its flames.

MENELAUS

Kill her, for thou wilt be punished by me for such a murder

ORESTES

Agreed.

MENELAUS

No, no! refrain!

ORESTES
Silence! thy sufferings are just; endure them.

MENELAUS
Pray, is it just that thou shouldst live?

ORESTES
And rule a kingdom, yes.

MENELAUS
A kingdom—where?

ORESTES
Here in Pelasgian Argos

MENELAUS
Thou art so well qualified to handle sacred water!

ORESTES
And, pray, why not?

MENELAUS
And to slay victims before battle!

ORESTES
Well, art thou?

MENELAUS
Yes, my hands are clean

ORESTES
But not thy heart.

MENELAUS
Who would speak to thee?

ORESTES
Every man that loves his father

MENELAUS
And the man who honours his mother?

ORESTES
He's a happy man.

MENELAUS
Thou didst not honour thine, at any rate.

ORESTES
No, for I delight not in your wicked women.

MENELAUS
Remove that sword from my daughter's throat.

ORESTES
Thou art wrong.

MENELAUS
What! wilt slay her?

ORESTES
Right once more.

MENELAUS
Ah me! what can I do?

ORESTES
Go to the Argives and persuade them—

MENELAUS
To what?

ORESTES
Entreat the city that we may not die.

MENELAUS
Otherwise, will ye slay my child?

ORESTES
That is the alternative

MENELAUS
Alas for thee, Helen!

ORESTES
And is it not "alas!" for me?

MENELAUS
I brought her back from Troy only for thee to butcher.

ORESTES
Would I had!

MENELAUS
After troubles innumerable.

ORESTES

Except where I was concerned.

MENELAUS

Dread treatment mine!

ORESTES

The reason being thy refusal to help me then?

MENELAUS

Thou hast me.

ORESTES

Thy own cowardice has. (*Calling from the roof to* ELECTRA) Ho there! fire the palace from beneath, Electra; and, Pylades, my trusty friend, kindle the parapet of yonder walls. (*The palace is seen to be ablaze.*)

MENELAUS

Help, help, ye Danai! gird on your harness and come, ye dwellers in knightly Argos! for here is a fellow trying to wrest his life from your whole city, though he has caused pollution by shedding his mother's blood.

(APOLLO *appears from above with* HELEN)

APOLLO

Menelaus, calm thy excited mood; I am Phoebus, the son of Latona, who draw nigh to call thee by name, and thou no less, Orestes, who, sword in hand, art keeping guard on yonder maid, that thou mayst hear what I have come to say. Helen, whom all thy eagerness failed to destroy, when thou wert seeking to anger Menelaus, is here as ye see in the enfolding air, rescued from death instead of slain by thee. 'Twas I that saved her and snatched her from beneath thy sword at the bidding of her father Zeus; for she his child must put on immortality, and take her place with Castor and Polydeuces in the bosom of the sky, a saviour to mariners. Choose thee then another bride and take her to thy home, for the gods by means of Helen's loveliness embroiled Troy and Hellas, causing death thereby, that they might lighten mother Earth of the outrage done her by the increase of man's number. Such is Helen's end.

But as for thee, Orestes, thou must cross the frontier of this land and dwell for one whole year on Parrhasian soil, which from thy flight thither shall be called the land of Orestes by Azanians and Arcadians; and when thou returnest thence to the city of Athens, submit to be brought to trial by "the Avenging Three" for thy mother's murder, for the gods will be umpires between you and will pass a most righteous sentence on thee upon the hill of Ares, where thou art to win thy case. Likewise, it is ordained, Orestes, that thou shalt wed Hermione, at whose neck thou art pointing thy sword; Neoptolemus shall never marry her, though he thinks he will;

for his death is fated to o'ertake him by a Delphian sword, when he claims satisfaction of me for the death of his father Achilles. Bestow thy sister's hand on Pylades, to whom thou didst formerly promise her, the life awaiting him henceforth is one of bliss.

Menelaus, leave Orestes to rule Argos; go thou and reign o'er Sparta, keeping it as the dowry of a wife, who till this day ne'er ceased exposing thee to toils innumerable. Between Orestes and the citizens, I, who forced his mother's murder on him, will bring about a reconciliation.

ORESTES

Hail to thee, prophetic Loxias, for these thy utterances! Thou art not a lying prophet after all, but a true seer; and yet there came a dreadful thought into my heart that it was some fiend I had listened to, when I seemed to hear thy voice; but all is ending well, and I obey thy word. There! I release Hermione from a violent death and agree to make her my wife whenever her father gives consent.

MENELAUS

All hail, Helen, daughter of Zeus! I wish thee joy of thy home in heaven's happy courts. To thee, Orestes, I betroth my daughter according to the word of Phoebus, and good luck attend thee, a noble wooer nobly wived, and me the parent of thy bride!

APOLLO

Repair each one to the place appointed by me; reconcile all strife.

MENELAUS

Obedience is a duty.

ORESTES

I think thus also, Menelaus, so here I make a truce with sorrow and with thy oracles, O Loxias.

APOLLO (*chanting*)

Go your ways, and honour Peace, most fair of goddesses; I, meantime, will escort Helen to the mansions of Zeus, soon as I reach the star-lit firmament. There, seated side by side with Hera and Hebe, the bride of Heracles, she shall be honoured by men with drink-offerings as a goddess for ever, sharing with those Zeus-born sons of Tyndareus their empire o'er the sea, for the good of mariners.

(APOLLO *and* HELEN *vanish*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Hail! majestic Victory, still in thy keeping hold my life and ne'er withhold the crown! [6]

COLERIDGE'S translation has been slightly modified in the following lines: 5, 168, 181, 226, 248, 394, 496, 564, 569, 604, 635, 641, 688, 700, 794, 859, 928–929, 1051, 1055, 1147, 1298, 1368, 1549, 1554, 1616, 1617, 1642, 1680.

1. *i.e.*, madness.

2. It is interesting to note that Euripides in this play follows the traditional legend of Helen.

3. Cf. Euripides, *Electra*, note 2.

4. This is usually taken to be a reference to Cleophon, the demagogue of Athens, who was of Thracian extraction.

5. The Greek word here is the adjectival form of *sophrosyne*. Cf. Euripides, *Hippolytus*, note 1.

6. Cf. the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, note 3.

XV
THE PHOENISSAE

Characters in the Play

Jocasta, *wife of* Oedipus
Old Servant, *an attendant of* Antigone
Antigone, *daughter of* Oedipus
Chorus of Phoenician Maidens
Polyneices, *exiled son of* Oedipus
Eteocles, *now King of Thebes; son of* Oedipus
Creon, *brother of* Jocasta
Teiresias, *a blind prophet*
Menoeceus, *son of* Creon
First Messenger
Second Messenger
Oedipus, *formerly King of Thebes*
Daughter of Teiresias, *guards, attendants*

INTRODUCTION

LIKE the *Orestes, The Phoenissae* enjoyed great popularity in antiquity. It was first presented probably about 409 B.C. and it evidently was in demand for revival as is indicated by the fact that the present text contains lines and passages which seem clearly to have come from the hand of a redactor. The most striking characteristic of the play is its great range and sweep of incidents. Euripides has taken the famous Theban story of Oedipus and of the curse upon the House of the Labdacidae, altered certain elements in it, and has presented within the limits of a single play a dramatic version of almost the entire legend. It must be remembered, however, that the original play probably was not so great in extent as it is in its present form.

One unique feature of *The Phoenissae* is the Chorus from which the play takes its name. The group is composed of Phoenician Maidens who have been dedicated by their native city to the service of Apollo. On their way to Delphi they have stopped for a time at Thebes, a city with which they have certain traditional ties. They are therefore able to serve in the play as relatively objective yet essentially sympathetic commentators upon the action as it develops.

The particular episodes of the legend which Euripides presents in his tragedy take place on the day when the Argive host under the leadership of Polyneices attacks Thebes. The dramatic date therefore is precisely the same as that of Aeschylus' *The Seven Against Thebes*. Euripides, however, has departed somewhat from the traditional version of the legend, for in his play both the aged blind Oedipus and his wife, Jocasta, are still living. In other respects the poet follows in general the received account which records the quarrel between Eteocles and Polyneices over the throne, the latter's exile, his attack upon the city, and the last fatal combat between the brothers when each fell by the other's hand.

The fact that both Oedipus and Jocasta are still alive in this revised version of the story enables Euripides to introduce into his play a number of effective dramatic scenes. The most striking of all occurs when Polyneices enters the city under the protection of a truce to see his mother, Jocasta. She in turn brings her two sons face to face and makes a final and

futile effort to bring about their reconciliation. This episode gives Euripides the opportunity to develop the contrasting characters of the brothers. Eteocles is portrayed as an individual consumed with ambition and who vigorously defends his attitude on virtually Nietzschean grounds. Polyneices on the other hand shrinks from and detests the criminal character of the acts which he is about to commit, yet is inevitably driven to them by the unbearable injustice which he has been made to suffer by Eteocles.

Not only is *The Phoenissae* interesting because of its relationship with Aeschylus' *The Seven Against Thebes,* but also because it reflects to some extent Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone.* For example, Antigone's betrothal to Haemon figures in the play, as well as the question whether or not the body of Polyneices shall receive ritual burial. Likewise the perennial seer Teiresias appears and is handled by Euripides in a manner clearly reminiscent of the prophet's appearance in *Oedipus the King.* The final scene of *The Phoenissae* obviously suggests the *Oedipus at Colonus,* for here we see the old king as he bitterly departs into exile, attended by his faithful daughter, Antigone, yet at the same time we are made aware that he looks forward to the peace which he will find at Colonus. Since Sophocles' play is generally supposed to have been written after *The Phoenissae,* critics have been disposed to conclude that this last scene is not genuine, but has been added to the play, in order that it might conform more closely with the Sophoclean tradition.[1]

Any careful criticism of *The Phoenissae* would have to contend that Euripides has here wrought an absorbing and fascinating drama. Many of the individual scenes are brilliantly done, and likewise in Jocasta and Polyneices, to take the most notable examples, the poet has created great tragic characters. The play as a whole has been well unified, and the dramatist by pulling together all the varied episodes of the legend has been able to produce a total effect which has undeniable power. Perhaps Euripides has not developed the larger religious or moral implications of his play, but he has presented in his protagonists human individuals who possess basic human dignity as they face manfully the complex and bitter stuff of human life.

[1] This argument cannot be regarded as absolutely final. For a complete discussion of those passages of the play whose genuineness has been suspected, cf. the introduction to J. U. Powell's edition of *The Phoenissae* (London, 1911).

THE PHOENISSAE

(SCENE:—*Before the royal palace of Thebes.* JOCASTA *enters from the palace alone.*)

JOCASTA

O SUN-GOD, who cleavest thy way along the starry sky, mounted on golden-studded car, rolling on thy path of flame behind fleet coursers, how curst the beam thou didst shed on Thebes, the day that Cadmus left Phoenicia's realm beside the sea and reached this land! He it was that in days long gone wedded Harmonia, the daughter of Cypris, and begat Polydorus from whom they say sprung Labdacus, and Laius from him. I am known as the daughter of Menoeceus, and Creon is my brother by the same mother. Men called me Jocasta, for so my father named me, and I am married to Laius. Now when he was still childless after being wedded to me a long time, he went and questioned Phoebus, craving moreover that our love might be crowned with sons born to his house. But the god said, "King of Thebes for horses famed! seek not to beget children against the will of heaven; for if thou beget a son, that child shall slay thee, and all thy house shall wade through blood." But he, yielding to his lust in a drunken fit, begat a son of me, and when his babe was born, conscious of his sin and of the god's warning, he gave the child to shepherds to expose in Hera's meadow on mount Cithaeron, after piercing his ankles with iron spikes; whence it was that Hellas named him Oedipus. But the keepers of the horses of Polybus finding him took him home and laid him in the arms of their mistress. So she suckled the child that I had borne and persuaded her husband she was its mother. Soon as my son was grown to man's estate, the tawny beard upon his cheek, either because he had guessed the fraud or learnt it from another, he set out for the shrine of Phoebus, eager to know for certain who his parents were; and likewise Laius, my husband, was on his way thither, anxious to find out if the child he had exposed was dead. And they twain met where the branching roads to Phocis unite; and the charioteer of Laius called to him, "Out of the way, stranger, room for my lord!" But he, with never a word, strode on in his pride; and the horses with their hoofs drew blood

from the tendons of his feet. Then—but why need I tell aught beyond the sad issue?—son slew father, and taking his chariot gave it to Polybus his foster-father. Now when the Sphinx was grievously harrying our city after my husband's death, my brother Creon proclaimed that he would wed me to any who should guess the riddle of that crafty maiden. By some strange chance, my own son, Oedipus, guessed the Sphinx's riddle, and so he became king of this land and received its sceptre as his prize, and married his mother, all unwitting, luckless wretch! nor did I his mother know that I was wedded to my son; and I bore him two sons, Eteocles and the hero Polyneices, and two daughters as well; the one her father called Ismene, the other, which was the elder, I named Antigone. Now when Oedipus, that awful sufferer, learnt that I his wedded wife was his mother too, he inflicted a ghastly outrage upon his eyes, tearing the bleeding orbs with a golden brooch. But since my sons have grown to bearded men, they have confined their father closely, that his misfortune, needing as it did full many a shift to hide it, might be forgotten. He is still living in the palace, but his misfortunes have so unhinged him that he imprecates the most unholy curses on his sons, praying that they may have to draw the sword before they share this house between them. So they, fearful that heaven may accomplish his prayer if they dwell together, have made an agreement, arranging that Polyneices, the younger, should first leave the land in voluntary exile, while Eteocles should stay and hold the sceptre for a year and then change places. But as soon as Eteocles was seated high in power, he refused to give up the throne, and drove Polyneices into exile from the kingdom; so Polyneices went to Argos and married into the family of Adrastus, and having collected a numerous force of Argives is leading them hither; and he is come up against our seven-gated walls, demanding the sceptre of his father and his share in the kingdom. Wherefore I, to end their strife, have prevailed on one son to meet the other under truce, before appealing to arms; and the messenger I sent tells me that he will come. O Zeus, whose home is heaven's radiant vault, save us, and grant that my sons may be reconciled! For thou, if thou art really wise, must not suffer the same poor mortal to be for ever wretched.

(JOCASTA *re-enters the palace, as the* OLD SERVANT *appears on the roof.*)

OLD SERVANT

Antigone, choice blossom in a father's house, although thy mother allowed thee at thy earnest treaty to leave thy maiden chamber for the topmost story of the house, thence to behold the Argive host, yet stay a moment that I may first reconnoitre the path, whether there be any of the citizens visible on the road, lest reproach, little as it matters to a slave like me, fasten on thee, my royal mistress; and when I am quite sure I will tell thee everything that I saw and heard from the Argives, when I

carried the terms of the truce to and fro between this city and Polyneices. (*After a slight pause*) No, there is no citizen approaching the palace; so mount the ancient cedar steps, and view the plains that skirt Ismenus and the fount of Dirce to see the mighty host of foemen.

(ANTIGONE *appears beside him. She chants her replies to him.*)

ANTIGONE

Stretch out thy hand to me from the stairs, the hand of age to youth, helping me to mount.

OLD SERVANT

There! clasp it, my young mistress; thou art come at a lucky moment; for Pelasgia's host is just upon the move, and their several contingents are separating.

ANTIGONE

O Hecate, dread child of Latona! the plain is one blaze of bronze.

OLD SERVANT

Ah! this is no ordinary home-coming of Polyneices; with many a knight and clash of countless arms he comes.

ANTIGONE

Are the gates fast barred, and the brazen bolts shot home into Amphion's walls of stone?

OLD SERVANT

Never fear! all is safe within the town. But mark him who cometh first, if thou wouldst learn his name.

ANTIGONE

Who is that with the white crest, who marches in the van, lightly bearing on his arm a buckler all of bronze?

OLD SERVANT

A chieftain, lady—

ANTIGONE

Who is he? whose son? his name? tell me, old man.

OLD SERVANT

Mycenae claims him for her son; in Lerna's glens he dwells, the prince Hippomedon.

ANTIGONE

Ah! how proud and terrible his mien! like to an earth-born giant he moves, with stars engraved upon his targe, resembling not a child of earth.

OLD SERVANT

Dost see yon chieftain crossing Dirce's stream?

ANTIGONE

His harness is quite different Who is that?

OLD SERVANT

Tydeus, the son of Oeneus; true Aetolian spirit fires his breast.

ANTIGONE

Is this he, old man, who wedded a sister of the wife of Polyneices? What a foreign look his armour has! a half-barbarian he!

OLD SERVANT

Yes, my child; all Aetolians carry shields, and are most unerring marksmen with their darts.

ANTIGONE

How art thou so sure of these descriptions, old man?

OLD SERVANT

I carefully noted the blazons on their shields before when I went with the terms of the truce to thy brother; so when I see them now I know who carry them

ANTIGONE

Who is that youth passing close to the tomb of Zethus, with long flowing hair, but a look of fury in his eye? is he a captain? for crowds of warriors follow at his heels

OLD SERVANT

That is Parthenopaeus, Atalanta's son.

ANTIGONE

May Artemis, who hies o'er the hills with his mother, lay him low with an arrow, for coming against my city to sack it!

OLD SERVANT

May it be so, my daughter; but with justice are they come hither, and my fear is that the gods will take the rightful view.

ANTIGONE

Where is he who was born of the same mother as I was by a cruel destiny? Oh! tell me, old friend, where Polyneices is.

OLD SERVANT

He is yonder, ranged next to Adrastus near the tomb of Niobe's seven unwed daughters. Dost see him?

ANTIGONE

I see him, yes! but not distinctly; 'tis but the outline of his form, the semblance of his stalwart limbs I see. Would I could speed through the sky, swift as a cloud before the wind, towards my own dear brother, and throw my arms about my darling's neck, so long, poor boy! an exile. How bright his golden weapons flash like the sun-god's morning rays!

OLD SERVANT

He will soon be here, to fill thy heart with joy, according to the truce.

ANTIGONE

Who is that, old man, on yonder car driving snow-white steeds?

OLD SERVANT

That, lady, is the prophet Amphiaraus; with him are the victims, whose streaming blood the thirsty earth will drink.

ANTIGONE

Daughter of Latona with the dazzling zone, O moon, thou orb of golden light! how quietly, with what restraint he drives, goading first one horse, then the other! But where is Capaneus who utters those dreadful threats against this city?

OLD SERVANT

Yonder he is, calculating how he may scale the towers, taking the measure of our walls from base to summit.

ANTIGONE

O Nemesis, with booming thunder-peals of Zeus and blazing levin-light, thine it is to silence such presumptuous boasting. Is this the man, who says he will give the maids of Thebes as captives of his spear to Mycenae's dames, to Lerna's Trident,[1] and the waters of Amymone, dear to Poseidon, when he has thrown the toils of slavery round them? Never, never, Artemis, my queen revered, child of Zeus with locks of gold, may I endure the yoke of slavery!

OLD SERVANT

My daughter, go within, and abide beneath the shelter of thy maiden chamber, now that thou hast had thy wish and seen all that thy heart desired; for I see a crowd of women moving toward the royal palace, confusion reigning in the city. Now the race of women by nature loves to find fault; and if they get some slight handle for their talk they exaggerate it, for they seem to take a pleasure in saying everything bad of one another.

(ANTIGONE *and the* OLD SERVANT *descend into the palace, as the* CHORUS OF PHOENICIAN MAIDENS *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

From the Tyrian main I come, an offering choice for Loxias from a Phoenician isle, to minister to Phoebus in his halls, where his fane lies nestling 'neath the snow-swept peaks of Parnassus; over the Ionian sea I rowed my course, for above the plains unharvested, that fringe the coast of Sicily, the boisterous west-wind coursed, piping sweetest music in the sky.

antistrophe 1

Chosen from my city as beauty's gift for Loxias, to the land of Cadmus I came, sent thither to the towers of Laius, the home of my kin, the famous sons of Agenor; and there I became the handmaid of Phoebus, dedicated like his offerings of wrought gold. But as yet the water of Castaly is waiting for me to bedew the maiden glory of my tresses for the service of Phoebus.

epode

Hail! thou rock that kindlest bright fire above the twin-peaked heights of Dionysus. Hail! thou vine, that, day by day, makest the lush bunches of thy grapes to drip. Hail! awful cavern of the serpent, and the god's outlook on the hills, and sacred mount by snow-storms lashed! would I were now circling in the dance of the deathless god, free from wild alarms, having left Dirce ere this for the vales of Phoebus at the centre of the world!

strophe 2

But now I find the impetuous god of war is come to battle before these walls, and hath kindled murder's torch in this city. God grant he fail! for a friend's sorrows are also mine; and if this land with its seven towers suffer any mischance, Phoenicia's realm must share it. Ah me! our stock is one; all children we of Io, that hornèd maid, whose sorrows I partake.

antistrophe 2

Around the city a dense array of serried shields is rousing the spectre of bloody strife, whose issue Ares shall soon learn to his cost, if he brings upon the sons of Oedipus the horrors of the curse. O Argos, city of Pelasgia! I dread thy prowess and the vengeance Heaven sends; for he who cometh against our home in full panoply is entering the lists with justice on his side.

(POLYNEICES *enters alone*)

POLYNEICES

Those who kept watch and ward at the gate admitted me so readily within the walls that my only fear is, that now they have caught me in their toils, they will not let me out unscathed; so I must turn my eye in every direction, hither and thither, to guard against all treachery. Armed with this sword, I shall inspire myself with the trust that is born of boldness. (*Starting*) What ho! who goes there? or is it an idle sound I fear? Everything seems a danger to venturous spirits, when their feet begin to tread an enemy's country. Still I trust my mother, and at the same time mistrust her for persuading me to come hither under truce. Well, there is help at hand, for the altar's hearth is close and there are people in the palace. Come, let me sheath my sword in its dark scabbard and ask these maidens standing near the house, who they are.

Ladies of another land, tell me from what country ye come to the halls of Hellas.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Phoenicia is my native land where I was born and bred; and Agenor's children's children sent me hither as a first-fruits of the spoils of war for Phoebus; but when the noble son of Oedipus was about to escort me to the hallowed oracle and the altars of Loxias, came Argives meantime against his city. Now tell me in return who *thou* art that comes to this fortress of the Theban realm with its seven gates.

POLYNEICES

My father was Oedipus, the son of Laius; my mother Jocasta, daughter of Menoeceus; and I am called Polyneices by the folk of Thebes.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O kinsman of Agenor's race, my royal masters who sent me hither, at thy feet, prince, I throw myself, according to the custom of my home. At last art thou come to thy native land; at last! Hail to thee! all hail! Come forth, my honoured mistress, open wide the doors. Dost hear, O mother of this chief? Why art thou delaying to leave the sheltering roof to fold thy son in thy embrace?

(JOCASTA *enters from the palace.*)

JOCASTA (*chanting*)

Maidens, I hear you call in your Phoenician tongue, and my old feet drag their tottering steps to meet my son. O my son, my son, at last after many a long day I see thee face to face; throw thy arms about thy mother's bosom; reach hither thy cheek to me and thy dark locks of clustering hair, o'ershadowing my neck therewith. Hail to thee! all hail! scarce now restored to thy mother's arms, when hope and expectation both were dead. What can I say to thee? how recall in every way, by word, by deed, the bliss of days long past, expressing my joy in the mazy measures of the dance? Ah! my son, thou didst leave thy father's halls desolate, when thy brother's despite drove thee thence in exile. Truly thou wert missed alike by thy friends and Thebes. This was why I cut off my silvered locks and let them fall for grief with many a tear, not clad in robes of white, my son, but instead thereof taking for my wear these sorry sable tatters; while within the palace that aged one with sightless orbs, ever nursing the sorrow of a double regret for the pair of brethren estranged from their home, rushed to lay hands upon himself with the sword or by the noose suspended o'er his chamber-roof, moaning his curses on his sons; and now he buries himself in darkness, weeping ever and lamenting. And thou, my child,—I hear thou hast taken an alien to wife and art begetting children to thy joy in thy home; they tell me thou art courting a foreign alliance, a ceaseless woe to me thy mother and to Laius thy ancestor, to have this woeful marriage foisted on us. 'Twas no hand of mine that lit for thee the marriage-torch, as custom ordains and as a happy mother ought; no part had Ismenus at thy wedding in supplying the luxurious bath; and there was silence through the streets of Thebes, what time thy young bride entered her home. Curses on them! whether it be the sword or strife or thy sire that is to blame, or heaven's visitation that hath burst so riotously upon the house of Oedipus; for on me is come all the anguish of these troubles.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Wondrous dear to woman is the child of her travail, and all her race hath some affection for its babes.

POLYNEICES

Mother, I have come amongst enemies wisely or foolishly; but all men needs must love their native land; whoso saith otherwise is pleased to say so but his thoughts are turned elsewhere. So fearful was I and in such terror, lest my brother might slay me by treachery that I made my way through the city sword in hand, casting my eyes all round me. My only hope is the truce and thy plighted word which induced me to enter my

paternal walls; and many a tear I shed by the way, seeing after a weary while my home and the altars of the gods, the training ground, scene of my childhood, and Dirce's founts from which I was unjustly driven to sojourn in a strange city, with tears ever gushing from mine eyes. Yea, and to add to my grief I see thee with hair cut short and clad in sable robe; woe is me for my sorrows!

How terrible, dear mother, is hatred 'twixt those once near and dear; how hard it makes all reconciliation! What doth my aged sire within the house, his light all darkness now? what of my sisters twain? Ah! they, I know, bewail my bitter exile.

JOCASTA

Some god with fell intent is plaguing the race of Oedipus. Thus it all began; I broke God's law and bore a son, and in an evil hour married thy father and thou wert born. But why repeat these horrors? what Heaven sends we have to bear. I am afraid to ask thee what I fain would, for fear of wounding thy feelings; yet I long to.

POLYNEICES

Nay, question me, leave naught unsaid; for thy will, mother, is my pleasure too.

JOCASTA

Well then, first I ask thee what I long to have answered. What means exile from one's country? is it a great evil?

POLYNEICES

The greatest; harder to bear than tell.

JOCASTA

What is it like? what is it galls the exile?

POLYNEICES

One thing most of all; he cannot speak his mind.

JOCASTA

This is a slave's lot thou describest, to refrain from uttering what one thinks.

POLYNEICES

The follies of his rulers must he bear.

JOCASTA

That too is bitter, to join in the folly of fools.

POLYNEICES

Yet to gain our ends we must submit against our nature.

JOCASTA

Hope, they say, is the exile's food.

POLYNEICES

Aye, hope that looks so fair; but she is ever in the future.

JOCASTA

But doth not time expose her futility?

POLYNEICES

She hath a certain winsome charm in misfortune.

JOCASTA

Whence hadst thou means to live, ere thy marriage found it for thee?

POLYNEICES

One while I had enough for the day, and then maybe I had it not.

JOCASTA

Did not thy father's friends and whilom guests assist thee?

POLYNEICES

Seek to be prosperous; once let fortune lour, and the aid supplied by friends is naught.

JOCASTA

Did not thy noble breeding exalt thy horn for thee?

POLYNEICES

Poverty is a curse; breeding would not find me food.

JOCASTA

Man's dearest treasure then, it seems, is his country.

POLYNEICES

No words of thine could tell how dear.

JOCASTA

How was it thou didst go to Argos? what was thy scheme?

POLYNEICES

I know not; the deity summoned me thither in accordance with my destiny.

JOCASTA

He doubtless had some wise design; but how didst thou win thy wife?

POLYNEICES
Loxias had given Adrastus an oracle.

JOCASTA
What was it? what meanest thou? I cannot guess.

POLYNEICES
That he should wed his daughters to a boar and a lion.

JOCASTA
What hadst thou, my son, to do with the name of beasts?

POLYNEICES
It was night when I reached the porch of Adrastus.

JOCASTA
In search of a resting-place, or wandering thither in thy exile?

POLYNEICES
Yes, I wandered thither; and so did another like me.

JOCASTA
Who was he? he too it seems was in evil plight.

POLYNEICES
Tydeus, son of Oeneus, was his name.

JOCASTA
But why did Adrastus liken you to wild beasts?

POLYNEICES
Because we came to blows about our bed.

JOCASTA
Was it then that the son of Talaus understood the oracle?

POLYNEICES
Yes, and he gave to us his daughters twain.

JOCASTA
Art thou blest or curst in thy marriage?

POLYNEICES
As yet I have no fault to find with it.

JOCASTA
How didst thou persuade an army to follow thee hither?

POLYNEICES

To me and to Tydeus who is my kinsman by marriage, Adrastus sware an oath, even to the husbands of his daughters twain, that he would restore us both to our country, but me the first. So many a chief from Argos and Mycenae has joined me, doing me a bitter though needful service, for 'tis against my own city I am marching. Now I call heaven to witness, that it is not willingly I have raised my arm against parents whom I love full well. But to thee, mother, it belongs to dissolve this unhappy feud, and, by reconciling brothers in love, to end my troubles and thine and this whole city's. 'Tis an old-world maxim, but I will cite it for all that: "Men set most store by wealth, and of all things in this world it hath the greatest power." This am I come to secure at the head of my countless host; for good birth is naught if poverty go with it.

LEADER

Lo! Eteocles comes hither to discuss the truce. Thine the task, O mother Jocasta, to speak such words as may reconcile thy sons.

(ETEOCLES *and his retinue enter.*)

ETEOCLES

Mother, I am here; but it was only to pleasure thee I came. What am I to do? Let some one begin the conference; for I stopped marshalling the citizens in double lines around the walls, that I might hear thy arbitration between us; for it is under this truce that thou hast persuaded me to admit this fellow within the walls.

JOCASTA

Stay a moment; haste never carries justice with it; but slow deliberation oft attains a wise result. Restrain the fierceness of thy look, that panting rage; for this is not the Gorgon's severed head but thy own brother whom thou seest here. Thou too, Polyneices, turn and face thy brother; for if thou and he stand face to face, thou wilt adopt a kindlier tone and lend a readier ear to him. I fain would give you both one piece of wholesome counsel; when a man that is angered with his friend confronts him face to face, he ought only to keep in view the object of his coming, forgetting all previous quarrels. Polyneices my son, speak first, for thou art come at the head of a Danaid host, alleging wrongful treatment; and may some god judge betwixt us and reconcile the trouble.

POLYNEICES

The words of truth are simple, and justice needs no subtle interpretations, for it hath a fitness in itself; but the words of injustice, being rotten in themselves, require clever treatment. I provided for his interests and mine in our father's palace, being anxious to avoid the curse which Oedipus

once uttered against us; of my own free-will I left the land, allowing him to rule our country for one full year, on condition that I should then take the sceptre in turn, instead of plunging into deadly enmity and thereby doing others hurt or suffering it myself, as is now the case. But he, after consenting to this and calling the gods to witness his oath, has performed none of his promises, but is still keeping the sovereignty in his own hands together with my share of our heritage. Even now am I ready to take my own and dismiss my army from this land, receiving my house in turn to dwell therein, and once more restore it to him for a like period instead of ravaging our country and planting scaling-ladders against the towers, as I shall attempt to do if I do not get my rights. Wherefore I call the gods to witness that spite of my just dealing in everything I am being unjustly robbed of my country by most godless fraud. Here, mother, have I stated the several points on their own merits, without collecting words to fence them in, but urging a fair case, I think, alike in the judgment of skilled or simple folk.

LEADER

To me at least, albeit I was not born and bred in Hellas, thy words seem full of sense.

ETEOCLES

If all were at one in their ideas of honour and wisdom, there would have been no strife to make men disagree; but, as it is, fairness and equality have no existence in this world beyond the name; there is really no such thing. For instance, mother, I will tell thee this without any concealment: I would ascend to the rising of the stars and the sun or dive beneath the earth, were I able so to do, to win a monarch's power, the chief of things divine. Therefore, mother, I will never yield this blessing to another, but keep it for myself; for it were a coward's act to lose the greater and to win the less. Besides, I blush to think that he should gain his object by coming with arms in his hand and ravaging the land; for this were foul disgrace to glorious Thebes, if I should yield my sceptre up to him for fear of Argive might. He ought not, mother, to have attempted reconcilement by armed force, for words compass everything that even the sword of an enemy might effect. Still, if on any other terms he cares to dwell here, he may; but the sceptre will I never willingly let go. Shall I become his slave, when I can be his master? Never! Wherefore come fire, come sword! harness your steeds, fill the plains with chariots, for I will not forego my throne for him. For if we must do wrong, to do so for a kingdom were the fairest cause, but in all else virtue should be our aim.

LEADER

Fair words are only called for when the deeds they crown are fair; otherwise they lose their charm and offend justice.

JOCASTA

Eteocles, my child, it is not all evil that attends old age; sometimes its experience can offer sager counsel than can youth. Oh! why, my son, art thou so set upon Ambition, that worst of deities? Forbear; that goddess knows not justice; many are the homes and cities once prosperous that she hath entered and left after the ruin of her votaries; she it is thou madly followest. Better far, my son, prize Equality that ever linketh friend to friend, city to city, and allies to each other; for Equality is man's natural law; but the less is always in opposition to the greater, ushering in the dayspring of dislike. For it is Equality that hath set up for man measures and divisions of weights and hath distinguished numbers; night's sightless orb, and radiant sun proceed upon their yearly course on equal terms, and neither of them is envious when it has to yield. Though sun and gloom then both are servants in man's interests, wilt not thou be content with thy fair share of thy heritage and give the same to him? if not, why where is justice? Why prize beyond its worth the monarch's power, injustice in prosperity? why think so much of the admiring glances turned on rank? Nay, 'tis vanity. Or wouldst thou by heaping riches in thy halls, heap up toil therewith? what advantage is it? 'tis but a name; for the wise find that enough which suffices for their wants. Man indeed hath no possessions of his own; we do but hold a stewardship of the gods' property; and when they will, they take it back again. Riches make no settled home, but are as transient as the day. Come, suppose I put before thee two alternatives, whether thou wilt rule or save thy city? Wilt thou say "Rule"?

Again, if Polyneices win the day and his Argive warriors rout the ranks of Thebes, thou wilt see this city conquered and many a captive maid brutally dishonoured by the foe; so will that wealth thou art so bent on getting become a grievous bane to Thebes; but still ambition fills thee. This I say to thee; and this to thee, Polyneices; Adrastus hath conferred a foolish favour on thee; and thou too hast shown little sense in coming to lay thy city waste. Suppose thou conquer this land (which Heaven forefend!) tell me, I conjure thee, how wilt thou rear a trophy to Zeus? how wilt thou begin the sacrifice after thy country's conquest or inscribe the spoils at the streams of Inachus with "Polyneices gave Thebes to the flames and dedicated these shields to the gods"? Oh! never, my son, be it thine to win such fame from Hellas! If, on the other hand, thou art worsted and thy brother's cause prevail, how shalt thou return to Argos, leaving countless dead behind? Some one will be sure to say, "Out on thee! Adrastus, for the evil bridegroom thou hast brought unto thy house; thanks to one maid's marriage, ruin is come on us."

Towards two evils, my son, art thou hasting,—loss of influence there and ruin in the midst of thy efforts here. Oh! my children, lay aside your violence; two men's follies, once they meet, result in very deadly evil.

LEADER

O heaven, avert these troubles and reconcile the sons of Oedipus in some way!

ETEOCLES

Mother, the season for parley is past; the time we still delay is idle waste; thy good wishes are of no avail, for we shall never be reconciled except upon the terms already named, namely, that I should keep the sceptre and be king of this land: wherefore cease these tedious warnings and let me be. (*Turning to* POLYNEICES) And as for thee, outside the walls, or die!

POLYNEICES

Who will slay me? who is so invulnerable as to plunge his sword in my body without reaping the self-same fate?

ETEOCLES

Thou art near him, aye, very near; dost see my arm?

POLYNEICES

I see it; but wealth is cowardly, a craven too fond of life.

ETEOCLES

Was it then to meet a dastard thou camest with all that host to war?

POLYNEICES

In a general caution is better than foolhardiness.

ETEOCLES

Relying on the truce, which saves thy life, thou turnest boaster.

POLYNEICES

Once more I ask thee to restore my sceptre and share in the kingdom.

ETEOCLES

I have naught to restore; 'tis my own house, and I will dwell therein.

POLYNEICES

What! and keep more than thy share?

ETEOCLES

Yes, I will. Begone!

POLYNEICES

O altars of my fathers' gods!—

ETEOCLES

Which thou art here to raze.

POLYNEICES

Hear me.

ETEOCLES

Who would hear thee after thou hast marched against thy fatherland?

POLYNEICES

O temples of those gods that ride on snow-white steeds! [2]

ETEOCLES

They hate thee.

POLYNEICES

I am being driven from my country.

ETEOCLES

Because thou camest to drive others thence.

POLYNEICES

Unjustly, O ye gods!

ETEOCLES

Call on the gods at Mycenae, not here.

POLYNEICES

Thou hast outraged right—

ETEOCLES

But I have not like thee become my country's foe.

POLYNEICES

By driving me forth without my portion.

ETEOCLES

And further I will slay thee.

POLYNEICES

O father, dost thou hear what I am suffering?

ETEOCLES

Yea, and he hears what thou art doing.

POLYNEICES

Thou too, mother mine?

ETEOCLES

Thou hast no right to mention thy mother.

POLYNEICES

O my city!

ETEOCLES

Get thee to Argos, and invoke the waters of Lerna.

POLYNEICES

I will; trouble not thyself; all thanks to thee though, mother mine.

ETEOCLES

Forth from the land!

POLYNEICES

I go, yet grant me to behold my father.

ETEOCLES

Thou shalt not have thy wish.

POLYNEICES

At least then my tender sisters.

ETEOCLES

No! them too thou shalt never see.

POLYNEICES

Ah, sisters mine!

ETEOCLES

Why dost thou, their bitterest foe, call on them?

POLYNEICES

Mother dear, to thee at least farewell!

JOCASTA

A joyous faring mine in sooth, my son!

POLYNEICES

Thy son no more!

JOCASTA

Born to sorrow, endless sorrow, I!

POLYNEICES

'Tis because my brother treats me despitefully.

ETEOCLES

I am treated just the same.

POLYNEICES

Where wilt thou be stationed before the towers?

ETEOCLES

Why ask me this?

POLYNEICES

I will array myself against thee for thy death.

ETEOCLES

I too have the same desire.

JOCASTA

Woe is me! what will ye do, my sons?

POLYNEICES

The event will show.

JOCASTA

Oh, fly your father's curse!

(JOCASTA *enters the palace.*)

ETEOCLES

Destruction seize our whole house!

POLYNEICES

Soon shall my sword be busy, plunged in gore. But I call my native land and heaven too to witness, with what contumely and bitter treatment I am being driven forth, as though I were a slave, not a son of Oedipus as much as he. If aught happen to thee, my city, blame him, not me; for I came not willingly, and all unwillingly am I driven hence. Farewell, king Phoebus, lord of highways; farewell palace and comrades; farewell ye statues of the gods, at which men offer sheep; for I know not if I shall ever again address you, though hope is still awake, which makes me confident that with heaven's help I shall slay this fellow and rule my native Thebes.

(POLYNEICES *departs.*)

ETEOCLES

Forth from the land! 'twas a true name our father gave thee, when, prompted by some god, he called thee Polyneices, a name denoting strife.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

To this land came Cadmus of Tyre, at whose feet an unyoked heifer threw itself down, giving effect to an oracle on the spot where

the god's response bade him take up his abode in Aonia's rich corn-lands, where gushing Dirce's fair rivers of water pour o'er verdant fruitful fields; here was born the Bromian god by her whom Zeus made a mother, round whom the ivy twined its wreaths while he was yet a babe, swathing him amid the covert of its green foliage as a child of happy destiny, to be a theme for Bacchic revelry among the maids and wives inspired in Thebes.

antistrophe

There lay Ares' murderous dragon, a savage warder, watching with roving eye the watered glens and quickening streams; him did Cadmus slay with a jagged stone, when he came thither to draw him lustral water, smiting that fell head with a blow of his death-dealing arm; but by the counsel of Pallas, motherless goddess, he cast the teeth upon the earth into deep furrows, whence sprang to sight a mail-clad host above the surface of the soil; but grim slaughter once again united them to the earth they loved, bedewing with blood the ground that had disclosed them to the sunlit breath of heaven.

epode

Thee too, Epaphus, child of Zeus, sprung from Io our ancestress, I call on in my foreign tongue; all hail to thee! hear my prayer uttered in accents strange, and visit this land; 'twas in thy honour thy descendants settled here, and those goddesses of twofold name, Persephone and kindly Demeter or Earth the queen of all, that feedeth every mouth, won it for themselves; send to the help of this land those torch-bearing queens; for to gods all things are easy.

ETEOCLES (*to an attendant*)

Go, fetch Creon son of Menoeceus, the brother of Jocasta my mother; tell him I fain would confer with him on matters affecting our public and private weal, before we set out to battle and the arraying of our host. But lo! he comes and saves thee the trouble of going; I see him on his way to my palace.

(CREON *enters.*)

CREON

To and fro have I been, king Eteocles, in my desire to see thee, and have gone all round the gates and sentinels of Thebes in quest of thee.

ETEOCLES

Why, and I was anxious to see thee, Creon; for I found the terms of peace far from satisfactory, when I came to confer with Polyneices.

CREON

I hear that he has wider aims than Thebes, relying on his alliance with the daughter of Adrastus and his army. Well, we must leave this dependent on the gods; meantime I am come to tell thee our chief obstacle.

ETEOCLES

What is that? I do not understand what thou sayest.

CREON

There is come one that was captured by the Argives.

ETEOCLES

What news does he bring from their camp?

CREON

He says the Argive army intend at once to draw a ring of troops round the city of Thebes, about its towers.

ETEOCLES

In that case the city of Cadmus must lead out its troops.

CREON

Whither? art thou so young that thine eyes see not what they should?

ETEOCLES

Across yon trenches for immediate action.

CREON

Our Theban forces are small, while theirs are numberless.

ETEOCLES

I well know they are reputed brave.

CREON

No mean repute have those Argives among Hellenes.

ETEOCLES

Never fear! I will soon fill the plain with their dead.

CREON

I could wish it so; but I see great difficulties in this.

ETEOCLES

Trust me, I will not keep my host within the walls.

CREON

Still victory is entirely a matter of good counsel.

ETEOCLES

Art anxious then that I should have recourse to any other scheme?

CREON

Aye to every scheme, before running the risk once for all.

ETEOCLES

Suppose we fall on them by night from ambuscade?

CREON

Good! provided in the event of defeat thou canst secure thy return hither.

ETEOCLES

Night equalizes risks, though it rather favours daring.

CREON

The darkness of night is a terrible time to suffer disaster.

ETEOCLES

Well, shall I fall upon them as they sit at meat?

CREON

That might cause them fright, but victory is what we want.

ETEOCLES

Dirce's ford is deep enough to prevent their retreat.

CREON

No plan so good as to keep well guarded.

ETEOCLES

What if our cavalry make a sortie against the host of Argos?

CREON

Their troops too are fenced all round with chariots.

ETEOCLES

What then can I do? am I to surrender the city to the foe?

CREON

Nay, nay! but of thy wisdom form some plan.

ETEOCLES

Pray, what scheme is wiser than mine?

CREON

They have seven chiefs, I hear.

ETEOCLES

What is their appointed task? their might can be but feeble.

CREON

To lead the several companies and storm our seven gates.

ETEOCLES

What are we to do? I will not wait till every chance is gone.

CREON

Choose seven chiefs thyself to set against them at the gates.

ETEOCLES

To lead our companies, or to fight single-handed?

CREON

Choose our very bravest men to lead the troops.

ETEOCLES

I understand; to repel attempts at scaling our walls.

CREON

With others to share the command, for one man sees not everything.

ETEOCLES

Selecting them for courage or thoughtful prudence?

CREON

For both; for one is naught without the other.

ETEOCLES

It shall be done; I will away to our seven towers and post captains at the gates, as thou advisest, pitting them man for man against the foe. To tell thee each one's name were grievous waste of time, when the foe is camped beneath our very walls.[3] But I will go, that my hands may no longer hang idle. May I meet my brother face to face, and encounter him hand to hand, e'en to the death, for coming to waste my country! But if I suffer any mischance, thou must see to the marriage 'twixt Antigone my sister and Haemon, thy son; and now, as I go forth to battle, I ratify their previous espousal. Thou art my mother's brother, so why need I say more? take care of her, as she deserves, both for thy own sake and mine. As for my sire he hath been guilty of folly against himself in putting out his eyes; small praise have I for him; by his curses maybe he will slay us too. One thing only have we still to do, to ask Teiresias, the seer, if he has aught to tell of heaven's will. Thy son Menoeceus, who bears thy father's name, will I send to fetch Teiresias hither, Creon; for with thee

he will readily converse, though I have ere now so scorned his art prophetic to his face, that he has reasons to reproach me. This commandment, Creon, I lay upon the city and thee; should my cause prevail, never give Polyneices' corpse a grave in Theban soil, and if so be some friend should bury him, let death reward the man. Thus far to thee; and to my servants thus, bring forth my arms and coat of mail, that I may start at once for the appointed combat, with right to lead to victory. To save our city we will pray to Caution, the best goddess to serve our end.

(ETEOCLES *and his retinue go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

O Ares, god of toil and trouble! why, why art thou possessed by a love of blood and death, out of harmony with the festivals of Bromius? 'Tis for no crowns of dancers fair that thou dost toss thy youthful curls to the breeze, singing the while to the lute's soft breath a strain to charm the dancers' feet; but with warriors clad in mail thou dost lead thy sombre revelry, breathing into Argive breasts a lust for Theban blood; with no wild waving of the thyrsus, clad in fawnskin thou dancest, but with chariots and bitted steeds wheelest thy charger strong of hoof. O'er the waters of Ismenus in wild career thou art urging thy horses, inspiring Argive breasts with hate of the earth-born race, arraying in brazen harness against these stone-built walls a host of warriors armed with shields. Truly Strife is a goddess to fear, who devised these troubles for the princes of this land, for the much-enduring sons of Labdacus.

antistrophe

O Cithaeron, apple of the eye of Artemis, holy vale of leaves, amid whose snows full many a beast lies couched, would thou hadst never reared the child exposed to die, Oedipus the fruit of Jocasta's womb, when as a babe he was cast forth from his home, marked with a golden brooch; and would the Sphinx, that wingèd maid, fell monster from the hills, had never come to curse our land with inharmonious strains; she that erst drew nigh our walls and snatched the sons of Cadmus away in her taloned feet to the pathless fields of light, a fiend sent by Hades from hell to plague the men of Thebes; once more unhappy strife is bursting out between the sons of Oedipus in city and home. For never can wrong be right, nor children of unnatural parentage come as a glory to the mother that bears them, but as a stain on the marriage of him who is father and brother at once.

epode

O earth, thou once didst bear,—so long ago I heard the story told by foreigners in my own home,—a race which sprang of the teeth of a snake with blood-red crest, that fed on beasts, to be the glory and reproach of Thebes. In days gone by the sons of heaven came to the wedding of Harmonia, and the walls of Thebes arose to the sound of the lyre and her towers stood up as Amphion played, in the midst between the double streams of Dirce, that watereth the green meadows fronting the Ismenus; and Io, our hornèd ancestress was mother of the kings of Thebes; thus our city through an endless succession of divers blessings has set herself upon the highest pinnacle of martial glory.

(TEIRESIAS *enters, led by his daughter. They are accompanied by* MENOECEUS.)

TEIRESIAS

Lead on, my daughter; for thou art as an eye to my blind feet, as certain as a star to mariners; lead my steps on to level ground; then go before, that we stumble not, for thy father has no strength; keep safe for me in thy maiden hand the auguries I took in the days I observed the flight and cries of birds seated in my holy prophet's chair. Tell me, young Menoeceus, son of Creon, how much further toward the city is it ere I reach thy father? for my knees grow weary, and I can scarce keep up this hurried pace.

CREON

Take heart, Teiresias, for thou hast reached thy moorings and art near thy friends; take him by the hand, my child; for just as every carriage has to wait for outside help to steady it, so too hath the step of age.

TEIRESIAS

Enough; I have arrived; why, Creon, dost thou summon me so urgently?

CREON

I have not forgotten that; but first collect thyself and regain breath, shaking off the fatigue of thy journey.

TEIRESIAS

I am indeed worn out, having arrived here only yesterday from the court of the Erechtheidae; for they too were at war, fighting with Eumolpus, in which contest I insured the victory of Cecrops' sons; and I received the golden crown, which thou seest me wearing, as first-fruits of the enemy's spoil.

CREON

I take thy crown of victory as an omen. We, as thou knowest, are exposed to the billows of an Argive war, and great is the struggle for Thebes. Eteocles, our king, is already gone in full harness to meet Mycenae's champions, and hath bidden me inquire of thee our best course to save the city.

TEIRESIAS

For Eteocles I would have closed my lips and refrained from all response, but to thee I will speak, since 'tis thy wish to learn. This country, Creon, has been long afflicted, ever since Laius became a father in heaven's despite, begetting hapless Oedipus to be his own mother's husband. That bloody outrage on his eyes was planned by heaven as an ensample to Hellas; and the sons of Oedipus made a gross mistake in wishing to throw over it the veil of time, as if forsooth they could outrun the gods' decree; for by robbing their father of his due honour and allowing him no freedom, they enraged their luckless sire; so he, stung by suffering and disgrace as well, vented awful curses against them; and I, because I left nothing undone or unsaid to prevent this, incurred the hatred of the sons of Oedipus. But death inflicted by each other's hands awaits them, Creon; and the many heaps of slain, some from Argive, some from Theban missiles, shall cause bitter lamentation in the land of Thebes. Alas! for thee, poor city, thou art being involved in their ruin, unless I can persuade one man. The best course was to prevent any child of Oedipus becoming either citizen or king in this land, since they were under a ban and would overthrow the city. But as evil has the mastery of good, there is still one other way of safety; but this it were unsafe for me to tell, and painful too for those whose high fortune it is to supply their city with the saving cure. Farewell! I will away; amongst the rest must I endure my doom, if need be; for what will become of me?

CREON

Stay here, old man.

TEIRESIAS

Hold me not.

CREON

Abide, why dost thou seek to fly?

TEIRESIAS

'Tis thy fortune that flies thee, not I

CREON

Tell me what can save Thebes and her citizens.

TEIRESIAS

Though this be now thy wish, it will soon cease to be.

CREON

Not wish to save my country? how can that be?

TEIRESIAS

Art thou still eager to be told?

CREON

Yea; for wherein should I show greater zeal?

TEIRESIAS

Then straightway shalt thou hear my words prophetic. But first I would fain know for certain where Menoeceus is, who led me hither.

CREON

Here, not far away, but at thy side.

TEIRESIAS

Let him retire far from my prophetic voice.

CREON

He is my own son and will preserve due silence.

TEIRESIAS

Wilt thou then that I tell thee in his presence?

CREON

Yea, for he will rejoice to hear the means of safety.

TEIRESIAS

Then hear the purport of my oracle, the which if ye observe ye shall save the city of Cadmus.

Thou must sacrifice Menoeceus thy son here for thy country, since thine own lips demand the voice of fate.[4]

CREON

What mean'st thou? what is this thou hast said, old man?

TEIRESIAS

To that which is to be thou also must conform.

CREON

O the eternity of woe thy minute's tale proclaims!

TEIRESIAS

Yes to thee, but to thy country great salvation.

CREON

I shut my ears; I never listened; to city now farewell!

TEIRESIAS

Ha! the man is changed; he is drawing back.

CREON

Go in peace; it is not thy prophecy I need.

TEIRESIAS

Is truth dead, because thou art curst with woe?

CREON

By thy knees and honoured locks I implore thee!

TEIRESIAS

Why implore me? thou art craving a calamity hard to guard against.

CREON

Keep silence; tell not the city thy news.

TEIRESIAS

Thou biddest me act unjustly; I will not hold my peace.

CREON

What wilt thou then do to me? slay my child?

TEIRESIAS

That is for others to decide; I have but to speak.

CREON

Whence came this curse on me and my son?

TEIRESIAS

Thou dost right to ask me and to test what I have said. In yonder lair, where the earth-born dragon kept watch and ward o'er Dirce's springs, must this youth be offered and shed his life-blood on the ground by reason of Ares' ancient grudge against Cadmus, who thus avenges the slaughter of his earth-born snake. If ye do this, ye shall win Ares as an ally; and if the earth receive crop for crop and human blood for blood, ye shall find her kind again, that erst to your sorrow reared from that dragon's seed a crop of warriors with golden casques; for needs must one sprung from the dragon's teeth be slain. Now thou art our only survivor of the seed of that sown race, whose lineage is pure alike on mother's and on father's side, thou and these thy sons. Haemon's marriage debars him from being the victim, for he is no longer single; for even if he have not consummated his marriage, yet is he betrothed; but this tender youth, con-

secrated to the city's service, might by dying rescue his country; and bitter will he make the return of Adrastus and his Argives, flinging o'er their eyes death's dark pall, and will glorify Thebes. Choose thee one of these alternatives; either save the city or thy son.

Now hast thou all I have to say. Daughter, lead me home. A fool, the man who practises the diviner's art; for if he should announce an adverse answer, he makes himself disliked by those who seek to him; while, if from pity he deceives those who are consulting him, he sins against Heaven. Phoebus should have been man's only prophet, for he fears no man.

(*His daughter leads* TEIRESIAS *out.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why so silent, Creon, why are thy lips hushed and dumb? I too am no less stricken with dismay.

CREON

Why, what could one say? 'Tis clear what my words must be. For I will never plunge myself so deeply into misfortune as to devote my son to death for the city; for love of children binds all men to life, and none would resign his own son to die. Let no man praise me into slaying my children. I am ready to die myself—for I am ripe in years—to set my country free. But thou, my son, ere the whole city learn this, up and fly with all haste away from this land, regardless of these prophets' unbridled utterances; for he will go to the seven gates and the captains there and tell all this to our governors and leaders; now if we can forestall him, thou mayst be saved, but if thou art too late, we are undone and thou wilt die.

MENOECEUS

Whither can I fly? to what city? to which of our guest-friends?

CREON

Fly where thou wilt be furthest removed from this land.

MENOECEUS

'Tis for thee to name a place, for me to carry out thy bidding.

CREON

After passing Delphi—

MENOECEUS

Whither must I go, father?

CREON

To Aetolia.

MENOECEUS

Whither thence?

CREON

To the land of Thesprotia.

MENOECEUS

To Dodona's hallowed threshold?

CREON

Thou followest me.

MENOECEUS

What protection shall I find me there?

CREON

The god will send thee on thy way.

MENOECEUS

How shall I find the means?

CREON

I will supply thee with money.

MENOECEUS

A good plan of thine, father. So go; for I will to thy sister, Jocasta, at whose breast I was suckled as a babe when reft of my mother and left a lonely orphan, to give her kindly greeting and then will I seek my safety. Come, come! be going, that there be no hindrance on thy part.

(CREON *departs.*)

How cleverly, ladies, I banished my father's fears by crafty words to gain my end; for he is trying to convey me hence, depriving the city of its chance and surrendering me to cowardice. Though an old man may be pardoned, yet in my case there is no excuse for betraying the country that gave me birth. So I will go and save the city, be assured thereof, and give my life up for this land. For this were shame, that they whom no oracles bind and who have not come under Fate's iron law, should stand there, shoulder to shoulder, with never a fear of death, and fight for their country before her towers, while I escape the kingdom like a coward, a traitor to my father and brother and city; and wheresoe'er I live, I shall appear a dastard. Nay, by Zeus and all his stars, by Ares, god of blood, who 'stablished the warrior-crop that sprung one day from earth as princes of this land, that shall not be! but go I will, and standing on the topmost battlements, will deal my own death-blow over the dragon's deep dark den, the spot the seer described, and will set my country free. I have spoken. Now I go to make the city a present of my life, no mean offering,

to rid this kingdom of its affliction. For if each were to take and expend all the good within his power, contributing it to his country's weal, our states would experience fewer troubles and would for the future prosper.

(MENOECEUS *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Thou cam'st, O winged fiend, spawn of earth and hellish viper-brood, to prey upon the sons of Cadmus, rife with death and fraught with sorrow, half a monster, half a maid, a murderous prodigy, with roving wings and ravening claws, that in days gone by didst catch up youthful victims from the haunts of Dirce, with discordant note, bringing a deadly curse, a woe of bloodshed to our native land. A murderous god he was who brought all this to pass. In every house was heard a cry of mothers wailing and of wailing maids, lamentation and the voice of weeping, as each took up the chant of death from street to street in turn. Loud rang the mourners' wail, and one great cry went up, whene'er that winged maiden bore some victim out of sight from the city.

antistrophe

At last came Oedipus, the man of sorrow, on his mission from Delphi to this land of Thebes, a joy to them then but afterwards a cause of grief; for, when he had read the riddle triumphantly, he formed with his mother an unhallowed union, woe to him! polluting the city; and by his curses, luckless wight, he plunged his sons into a guilty strife, causing them to wade through seas of blood. All reverence do we feel for him, who is gone to his death in his country's cause, bequeathing to Creon a legacy of tears, but destined to crown with victory our seven fenced towers. May our motherhood be blessed with such noble sons, O Pallas, kindly queen, who with well-aimed stone didst spill the serpent's blood, rousing Cadmus as thou didst to brood upon the task, whereof the issue was a demon's curse that swooped upon this land and harried it.

(*The* FIRST MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Ho there! who is at the palace-gates? Open the door, summon Jocasta forth. Ho there! once again I call; spite of this long delay come forth; hearken, noble wife of Oedipus; cease thy lamentation and thy tears of woe.

(JOCASTA *enters from the palace in answer to his call.*)

JOCASTA

Surely thou art not come, my friend, with the sad news of Eteocles' death, beside whose shield thou hast ever marched, warding from him the foeman's darts? What tidings art thou here to bring me? Is my son alive or dead? Declare that to me.

MESSENGER

To rid thee of thy fear at once, he lives; that terror banish.

JOCASTA

Next, how is it with the seven towers that wall us in?

MESSENGER

They stand unshattered still; the city is not yet a prey.

JOCASTA

Have they been in jeopardy of the Argive spear?

MESSENGER

Aye, on the very brink; but our Theban warriors proved too strong for Mycenae's might.

JOCASTA

One thing tell me, I implore; knowest thou aught of Polyneices, is he yet alive? for this too I long to learn.

MESSENGER

As yet thy sons are living, the pair of them.

JOCASTA

God bless thee! How did you succeed in beating off from our gates the Argive hosts, when thus beleaguered? Tell me, that I may go within and cheer the old blind man, since our city is still safe.

MESSENGER

After Creon's son, who gave up life for country, had taken his stand on the turret's top and plunged a sword dark-hilted through his throat to save this land, thy son told off seven companies with their captains to the seven gates to keep watch on the Argive warriors, and stationed cavalry to cover cavalry, and infantry to support infantry, that assistance might be close at hand for any weak point in the walls. Then from our lofty towers we saw the Argive host with their white shields leaving Teumessus, and, when near the trench, they charged up to our Theban city at the double. In one loud burst from their ranks and from our battlements rang out the battle-cry and trumpet-call. First to the Neistian gate, Parthenopaeus, son of the huntress maid, led a company bristling

with serried shields, himself with his own peculiar badge in the centre of his targe, Atalanta slaying the Aetolian boar with an arrow shot from far. To the gates of Proetus came the prophet Amphiaraus, bringing the victims on a chariot; no vaunting blazon he carried, but weapons chastely plain. Next prince Hippomedon came marching to the Ogygian port with this device upon his boss, Argus the all-seeing with his spangled eyes upon the watch whereof some open with the rising stars, while others he closes when they set, as one could see after he was slain. At the Homoloian gates Tydeus was posting himself, a lion's skin with shaggy mane upon his buckler, while in his right hand he bore a torch, like Titan Prometheus, to fire the town. Thy own son Polyneices led the battle 'gainst the Fountain gate; upon his shield for blazon were the steeds of Potniae galloping at frantic speed, revolving by some clever contrivance on pivots inside the buckler close to the handle, so as to appear distraught. At Electra's gate famed Capaneus brought up his company, bold as Ares for the fray; this device his buckler bore upon its iron back, an earth-born giant carrying on his shoulders a whole city which he had wrenched from its base, a hint to us of the fate in store for Thebes. Adrastus was stationed at the seventh gate; a hundred vipers filled his shield with graven work, as he bore on his left arm that proud Argive badge, the hydra, and serpents were carrying off in their jaws the sons of Thebes from within their very walls. Now I was enabled to see each of them, as I carried the watch-word along the line to the leaders of our companies. To begin with, we fought with bows and thonged javelins, with slings that shoot from far and showers of crashing stones; and as we were conquering, Tydeus and thy son on a sudden cried aloud, "Ye sons of Argos, before being riddled by their fire, why delay to fall upon the gates with might and main, the whole of you, light-armed and horse and charioteers?" No loitering then, soon as they heard that call; and many a warrior fell with bloody crown, and not a few of us thou couldst have seen thrown to the earth like tumblers before the walls, after they had given up the ghost, bedewing the thirsty ground with streams of gore. Then Atalanta's son, who was not an Argive but an Arcadian, hurling himself like a hurricane at the gates, called for fire and picks to raze the town; but Periclymenus, son of the ocean-god, stayed his wild career, heaving on his head a waggon-load of stone, even the coping torn from the battlements; and it shattered his head with the hair and crashed through the sutures of the skull, dabbling with blood his cheek just showing manhood's flush; and never shall he go back alive to his fair archer-mother, the maid of Maenalus.

Thy son then, seeing these gates secure, went on to the next, and I with him. There I saw Tydeus and his serried ranks of targeteers hurling their Aetolian spears into the opening at the top of the turrets, with such good aim that our men fled and left the beetling battlements: but thy son rallied

them once more, as a huntsman cheers his hounds, and made them man the towers again. And then away we hastened to other gates, after stopping the panic there. As for the madness of Capaneus, how am I to describe it? There was he, carrying with him a long scaling-ladder and loudly boasting that even the awful lightning of Zeus would not stay him from giving the city to utter destruction; and even as he spoke, he crept up beneath the hail of stones, gathered under the shelter of his shield, mounting from rung to rung on the smooth ladder; but, just as he was scaling the parapet of the wall, Zeus smote him with a thunderbolt; loud the earth re-echoed, and fear seized every heart; for his limbs were hurled from the ladder far apart as from a sling, his head toward the sky, his blood toward earth, while his legs and arms went spinning round like Ixion's wheel, till his charred corpse fell to the ground. But when Adrastus saw that Zeus was leagued against his army, he drew the Argive troops outside the trench and halted them. Meantime our horse, marking the lucky omen of Zeus, began driving forth their chariots, and our men-at-arms charged into the thick of the Argives, and everything combined to their discomfiture; men were falling and hurled headlong from chariots, wheels flew off, axles crashed together, while ever higher grew the heaps of slain; so for to-day at least have we prevented the destruction of our country's bulwarks; but whether fortune will hereafter smile upon this land, that rests with Heaven; for, even as it is, it owes its safety to some deity.

Victory is fair; and if the gods are growing kinder, it would be well with me.

JOCASTA

Heaven and fortune smile; for my sons are yet alive and my country hath escaped ruin. But Creon seems to have reaped the bitter fruit of my marriage with Oedipus, by losing his son to his sorrow, a piece of luck for Thebes, but bitter grief to him. Prithee to thy tale again and say what my two sons next intend.

MESSENGER

Forbear to question further; all is well with thee so far.

JOCASTA

Thy words but rouse my suspicions; I cannot leave it thus.

MESSENGER

Hast thou any further wish than thy sons' safety?

JOCASTA

Yea, I would learn whether in the sequel I am also blest.

MESSENGER

Let me go; thy son is left without his squire.

JOCASTA

There is some evil thou art hiding, veiling it in darkness.

MESSENGER

Maybe; I would not add ill news to the good thou hast heard.

JOCASTA

Thou must, unless thou take wings and fly away.

MESSENGER

Ah! why didst thou not let me go after announcing my good news, instead of forcing me to disclose evil? Those two sons of thine are resolved on deeds of shameful recklessness, a single combat apart from the host, addressing to Argives and Thebans alike words I would they had never uttered. Eteocles, taking his stand on a lofty tower, after ordering silence to be proclaimed to the army, began on this wise, "Ye captains of Hellas, chieftains of Argos here assembled, and ye folk of Cadmus, barter not your lives for Polyneices or for me! For I myself excuse you from this risk, and will engage my brother in single combat; and if I slay him, I will possess my palace without rival, but if I am worsted I will bequeath the city to him. Ye men of Argos, give up the struggle and return to your land, nor lose your lives here; of the earth-sown folk as well there are dead enough in those already slain."

So he; then thy son Polyneices rushed from the array and assented to his proposal; and all the Argives and the people of Cadmus shouted their approval, as though they deemed it just. On these terms the armies made a truce, and in the space betwixt them took an oath of each other for their leaders to abide by. Forthwith in brazen mail those two sons of aged Oedipus were casing themselves; and lords of Thebes with friendly care equipped the captain of this land, while Argive chieftains armed the other. There they stood in dazzling sheen, neither blenching, all eagerness to hurl their lances each at the other. Then came their friends to their side, first one, then another, with words of encouragement, to wit:

"Polyneices, it rests with thee to set up an image of Zeus as a trophy, and crown Argos with fair renown."

Others hailed Eteocles: "Now art thou fighting for thy city; now, if victorious, thou hast the sceptre in thy power."

So spake they, cheering them to the fray.

Meantime the seers were sacrificing sheep and noting the tongues and forks of fire, the damp reek which is a bad omen, and the tapering flame, which gives decisions on two points, being both a sign of victory and de-

feat. But, if thou hast any power or subtle speech or charmèd spell, go, stay thy children from this fell affray, for great is the risk they run. The issue thereof will be grievous sorrow for thee, if to-day thou art reft of both thy sons.

(*The* MESSENGER *departs in haste as* ANTIGONE *comes out of the palace*.)

JOCASTA

Antigone, my daughter, come forth before the palace; this heaven-sent crisis is no time for thee to be dancing or amusing thyself with girlish pursuits. But thou and thy mother must prevent two gallant youths, thy own brothers, from plunging into death and falling by each other's hand.

ANTIGONE

Mother mine, what new terror art thou proclaiming to thy dear ones before the palace?

JOCASTA

Daughter, thy brothers are in danger of their life.

ANTIGONE

What mean'st thou?

JOCASTA

They have resolved on single combat.

ANTIGONE

O horror! what hast thou to tell, mother?

JOCASTA

No welcome news; follow me.

ANTIGONE

Whither away from my maiden-bower?

JOCASTA

To the army.

ANTIGONE

I cannot face the crowd.

JOCASTA

Modesty is not for thee now.

ANTIGONE

But what can I do?

JOCASTA

Thou shalt end thy brothers' strife.

ANTIGONE

By what means, mother mine?

JOCASTA

By falling at their knees with me.

ANTIGONE

Lead on till we are 'twixt the armies; no time for lingering now.

JOCASTA

Haste, my daughter, haste! For, if I can forestall the onset of my sons, I may yet live; but if they be dead, I will lay me down and die with them.

(JOCASTA *and* ANTIGONE *hurriedly depart.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Ah me! my bosom thrills with terror; and through my flesh there passes a throb of pity for the hapless mother. Which of her two sons will send the other to a bloody grave? ah, woe is me! O Zeus, O earth, alas! brother severing brother's throat and robbing him of life, cleaving through his shield to spill his blood? Ah me! ah me! which of them will claim my dirge of death?

antistrophe

Woe unto thee, thou land of Thebes! two savage beasts, two murderous souls, with brandished spears will soon be draining each his fallen foeman's gore. Woe is them, that they ever thought of single combat! in foreign accent will I chant a dirge of tears and wailing in mourning for the dead. Close to murder stands their fortune; the coming day will decide it. Fatal, ah! fatal will this slaughter be, because of the avenging fiends.

But I see Creon on his way hither to the palace with brow o'ercast; I will check my present lamentations.

(CREON *enters. He is followed by attendants carrying the body of* MENOECEUS.)

CREON

Ah me! what shall I do? Am I to mourn with bitter tears myself or my city, round which is settling a swarm thick enough to send us to Acheron? My own son hath died for his country, bringing glory to his name but grievous woe to me. His body I rescued but now from the dragon's rocky lair and sadly carried the self-slain victim hither in my arms; and my house is filled with weeping; but now I come to fetch my sister Jocasta,

age seeking age, that she may bathe my child's corpse and lay it out. For the living must reverence the nether god by paying honour to the dead.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thy sister, Creon, hath gone forth and her daughter Antigone went with her.

CREON

Whither went she? and wherefore? tell me.

LEADER

She heard that her sons were about to engage in single combat for the royal house.

CREON

What is this? I was paying the last honours to my dead son, and so am late in learning this fresh sorrow.

LEADER

'Tis some time, Creon, since thy sister's departure, and I expect the struggle for life and death is already decided by the sons of Oedipus.

CREON

Alas! I see an omen there, the gloomy look and clouded brow of yonder messenger coming to tell us the whole matter.

(*The* SECOND MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Ah, woe is me! what language can I find to tell my tale?

CREON

Our fate is sealed; thy opening words do naught to reassure us.

MESSENGER

Ah, woe is me! I do repeat; for beside the scenes of woe already enacted I bring tidings of new horror.

CREON

What is thy tale?

MESSENGER

Thy sister's sons are now no more, Creon.

CREON

Alas! thou hast a heavy tale of woe for me and Thebes

LEADER

O house of Oedipus, hast thou heard these tidings?

CREON

Of sons slain by the self-same fate.

LEADER

A tale to make it weep, were it endowed with sense.

CREON

Oh! most grievous stroke of fate! woe is me for my sorrows! woe!

MESSENGER

Woe indeed! didst thou but know the sorrows still to tell.

CREON

How can they be more hard to bear than these?

MESSENGER

With her two sons thy sister has sought her death.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Loudly, loudly raise the wail, and with white hands smite upon your heads!

CREON

Ah! woe is thee, Jocasta! what an end to life and marriage hast thou found the riddling of the Sphinx! But tell me how her two sons wrought the bloody deed, the struggle caused by the curse of Oedipus.

MESSENGER

Of our successes before the towers thou knowest, for the walls are not so far away as to prevent thy learning each event as it occurred. Now when they, the sons of aged Oedipus, had donned their brazen mail, they went and took their stand betwixt the hosts, chieftains both and generals too, to decide the day by single combat. Then Polyneices, turning his eyes towards Argos, lifted up a prayer; "O Hera, awful queen,—for thy servant I am, since I have wedded the daughter of Adrastus and dwell in his land,—grant that I may slay my brother, and stain my lifted hand with the blood of my conquered foe. A shameful prize it is I ask, my own brother's blood." And to many an eye the tear would rise at their sad fate, and men looked at one another, casting their glances round.

But Eteocles, looking towards the temple of Pallas with the golden shield, prayed thus, "Daughter of Zeus, grant that this right arm may launch the spear of victory against my brother's breast and slay him who hath come to sack my country." Soon as the Tuscan trumpet blew, the signal for the bloody fray, like the torch that falls,[5] they darted wildly at one another and, like boars whetting their savage tusks, began the fray, their beards wet with foam; and they kept shooting out their spears, but

each crouched beneath his shield to let the steel glance idly off; but if either saw the other's face above the rim, he would aim his lance thereat, eager to outwit him.

But both kept such careful outlook through the spy-holes in their shields, that their weapons found naught to do; while from the on-lookers far more than the combatants trickled the sweat caused by terror for their friends. Suddenly Eteocles, in kicking aside a stone that rolled beneath his tread, exposed a limb outside his shield, and Polyneices seeing a chance of dealing him a blow, aimed a dart at it, and the Argive shaft went through his leg; whereat the Danai, one and all, cried out for joy. But the wounded man, seeing a shoulder unguarded in this effort, plunged his spear with all his might into the breast of Polyneices, restoring gladness to the citizens of Thebes, though he brake off the spear-head; and so, at a loss for a weapon, he retreated foot by foot, till catching up a splintered rock he let it fly and shivered the other's spear; and now was the combat equal, for each had lost his lance. Then clutching their sword-hilts they closed, and round and round, with shields close-locked, they waged their wild warfare. Anon Eteocles introduced that crafty Thessalian trick, having some knowledge thereof from his intercourse with that country; disengaging himself from the immediate contest, he drew back his left foot but kept his eye closely on the pit of the other's stomach from a distance; then advancing his right foot he plunged his weapon through his navel and fixed it in his spine. Down falls Polyneices, blood-bespattered, ribs and belly contracting in his agony. But that other, thinking his victory now complete, threw down his sword and set to spoiling him, wholly intent thereon, without a thought for himself. And this indeed was his ruin; for Polyneices, who had fallen first, was still faintly breathing, and having in his grievous fall retained his sword, he made a last effort and drove it through the heart of Eteocles. There they lie, fallen side by side, biting the dust with their teeth, without having decided the mastery.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, woe is thee! Oedipus, for thy sorrows! how I pity thee! Heaven, it seems, has fulfilled those curses of thine.

MESSENGER

Now hear what further woes succeeded. Just as her two sons had fallen and lay dying, comes their wretched mother on the scene, her daughter with her, in hot haste; and when she saw their mortal wounds, "Too late," she moaned, "my sons, the help I bring"; and throwing herself on each in turn she wept and wailed, sorrowing o'er all her toil in suckling them: and so too their sister, who was with her, "Supporters of your mother's age! dear brothers, leaving me forlorn, unwed!" Then prince Eteocles

with one deep dying gasp, hearing his mother's cry, laid on her his moist hand, and though he could not say a word, his tear-filled eyes were eloquent to prove his love. But Polyneices was still alive, and seeing his sister and his aged mother he said, "Mother mine, our end is come; I pity thee and my sister Antigone and my dead brother. For I loved him though he turned my foe, I loved him, yes! in spite of all. Bury me, mother mine, and thou, my sister dear, in my native soil; pacify the city's wrath that I may get at least that much of my own fatherland, although I lost my home. With thy hand, mother, close mine eyes (therewith he himself places her fingers on the lids); and fare ye well; for already the darkness wraps me round."

So both at once breathed out their life of sorrow. But when their mother saw this sad mischance, in her o'ermastering grief she snatched from a corpse its sword and wrought an awful deed, driving the steel right through her throat; and there she lies, dead with the dead she loved so well, her arms thrown round them both.

Thereon the host sprang to their feet and fell to wrangling, we maintaining that victory rested with my master, they with theirs; and amid our leaders the contention raged, some holding that Polyneices gave the first wound with his spear, others that, as both were dead, victory rested with neither. Meantime Antigone crept away from the host; and those others rushed to their weapons, but by some lucky forethought the folk of Cadmus had sat down under arms; and by a sudden attack we surprised the Argive host before it was fully equipped. Not one withstood our onset, and they filled the plain with fugitives, while blood was streaming from the countless dead our spears had slain. Soon as victory crowned our warfare, some began to rear an image to Zeus for the foe's defeat, others were stripping the Argive dead of their shields and sending their spoils inside the battlements; and others with Antigone are bringing her dead brothers hither for their friends to mourn. So the result of this struggle to our city hovers between the two extremes of good and evil fortune.

(*The* MESSENGER *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

No longer do the misfortunes of this house extend to hearsay only; three corpses of the slain lie here at the palace for all to see, who by one common death have passed to their life of gloom.

(*During the lament,* ANTIGONE *enters, followed by servants who bear the bodies of* JOCASTA, ETEOCLES, *and* POLYNEICES.)

ANTIGONE (*chanting*)

No veil I draw o'er my tender cheek shaded with its clustering curls; no shame I feel from maiden modesty at the hot blood man-

tling 'neath my eyes, the blush upon my face, as I hurry wildly on in death's train, casting from my hair its tire and letting my delicate robe of saffron hue fly loose, a tearful escort to the dead. Ah me!

Woe to thee, Polyneices! rightly named, I trow; woe to thee, Thebes! no mere strife to end in strife was thine; but murder completed by murder hath brought the house of Oedipus to ruin with bloodshed dire and grim. O my home, my home! what minstrel can I summon from the dead to chant a fitting dirge o'er my tearful fate, as I bear these three corpses of my kin, my mother and her sons, a welcome sight to the avenging fiend that destroyed the house of Oedipus, root and branch, in the hour that his shrewdness solved the Sphinx's riddling rhyme and slew that savage songstress. Woe is me! my father! what other Hellene or barbarian, what noble soul among the bygone tribes of man's poor mortal race ever endured the anguish of such visible afflictions?

Ah! poor maid, how piteous is thy plaint! What bird from its covert 'mid the leafy oak or soaring pine-tree's branch will come to mourn with me, the maid left motherless, with cries of woe, lamenting, ere it comes, the piteous lonely life, that henceforth must be always mine with tears that ever stream? On which of these corpses shall I throw my offerings first, plucking the hair from my head? on the breast of the mother that suckled me, or beside the ghastly death-wounds of my brothers' corpses? Woe to thee, Oedipus, my aged sire with sightless orbs, leave thy roof, disclose the misery of thy life, thou that draggest out a weary existence within the house, having cast a mist of darkness o'er thine eyes. Dost hear, thou whose aged step now gropes its way across the court, now seeks repose on wretched pallet couch?

(OEDIPUS *enters from the palace. He chants the following lines responsively with* ANTIGONE)

OEDIPUS

Why, daughter, hast thou dragged me to the light, supporting my blind footsteps from the gloom of my chamber, where I lie upon my bed and make piteous moan, a hoary sufferer, invisible as a phantom of the air, or as a spirit from the pit, or as a dream that flies?

ANTIGONE

Father, there are tidings of sorrow for thee to bear; no more thy sons behold the light, or thy wife who ever would toil to tend thy blind footsteps as with a staff. Alas for thee, my sire!

OEDIPUS

Ah me, the sorrows I endure! I may well say that. Tell me, child, what fate o'ertook those three, and how they left the light.

ANTIGONE

Not to reproach or mock thee say I this, but in all sadness; 'tis thy own avenging curse, with all its load of slaughter, fire, and ruthless war, that is fallen on thy sons. Alas for thee, my sire!

OEDIPUS

Ah me!

ANTIGONE

Why dost thou groan?

OEDIPUS

'Tis for my sons.

ANTIGONE

Couldst thou have looked towards yon sun-god's four-horsed car and turned the light of thine eyes on these corpses, it would have been agony to thee.

OEDIPUS

'Tis clear enough how their evil fate o'ertook my sons; but she, my poor wife—oh! tell me, daughter, how she came to die.

ANTIGONE

All saw her weep and heard her moan, as she rushed forth to carry to her sons her last appeal, a mother's breast. But the mother found her sons at the Electran gate, in a meadow where the lotus blooms, fighting out their duel like lions in their lair, eager to wound each other with spears, their blood already congealed, a murderous libation to the Death-god poured out by Ares. Then, snatching from a corpse a sword of hammered bronze, she plunged it in her flesh, and in sorrow for her sons fell with her arms around them. So to-day, father, the god, whose'er this issue is, has gathered to a head the sum of suffering for our house.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

To-day is the beginning of many troubles to the house of Oedipus; may he live to be more fortunate!

CREON

Cease now your lamentations; 'tis time we bethought us of their burial. Hear what I have to say, Oedipus. Eteocles, thy son, left me to rule this

land, by assigning it as a marriage portion to Haemon with the hand of thy daughter Antigone. Wherefore I will no longer permit thee to dwell therein, for Teiresias plainly declared that the city would never prosper so long as thou wert in the land. So begone! And this I say not to flout thee, nor because I bear thee any grudge, but from fear that some calamity will come upon the realm by reason of those fiends that dog thy steps.

OEDIPUS

O destiny! to what a life of pain and sorrow didst thou bear me beyond all men that ever were, e'en from the very first; yea for when I was yet unborn, or ever I had left my mother's womb and seen the light, Apollo foretold to Laius that I should become my father's murderer; woe is me! So, as soon as I was born, my father tried to end again the hapless life he had given, deeming me his foe, for it was fated he should die at my hand; so he sent me still unweaned to make a pitiful meal for beasts, but I escaped from that. Ah! would that Cithaeron had sunk into hell's yawning abyss, in that it slew me not! Instead thereof Fate made me a slave in the service of Polybus; and I, poor wretch, after slaying my own father came to wed my mother to her sorrow, and begat sons that were my brothers, whom also I have destroyed, by bequeathing unto them the legacy of curses I received from Laius. For nature did not make me so void of understanding, that I should have devised these horrors against my own eyes and my children's life without the intervention of some god. Let that pass. What am I, poor wretch, to do? Who now will be my guide and tend the blind man's step? Shall she, that is dead? Were she alive, I know right well she would. My pair of gallant sons, then? But they are gone from me. Am I still so young myself that I can find a livelihood? Whence could I? O Creon, why seek thus to slay me utterly? For so thou wilt, if thou banish me from the land. Yet will I never twine my arms about thy knees and betray cowardice, for I will not belie my former gallant soul, no! not for all my evil case.

CREON

Thy words are brave in refusing to touch my knees, and I am equally resolved not to let thee abide in the land. For these dead, bear one forthwith to the palace; but the other, who came with stranger folk to sack his native town, the dead Polyneices, cast forth unburied beyond our frontiers. To all the race of Cadmus shall this be proclaimed, that whosoe'er is caught decking his corpse with wreaths or giving it burial, shall be requited with death; unwept, unburied let him lie, a prey to birds. As for thee, Antigone, leave thy mourning for these lifeless three and betake thyself indoors to abide there in maiden state until to-morrow, when Haemon waits to wed thee.

ANTIGONE

O father, in what cruel misery are we plunged! For thee I mourn more than for the dead; for in thy woes there is no opposite to trouble, but universal sorrow is thy lot. As for thee, thou new-made king, why, I ask, dost thou mock my father thus with banishment? Why start making laws over a helpless corpse?

CREON

This was what Eteocles, not I, resolved.

ANTIGONE

A foolish thought, and foolish art thou for entertaining it!

CREON

What! ought I not to carry out his behests?

ANTIGONE

No; not if they are wrong and ill-advised.

CREON

Why, is it not just for that other to be given to the dogs?

ANTIGONE

Nay, the vengeance ye are exacting is no lawful one.

CREON

It is; for he was his country's foe, though not a foeman born.

ANTIGONE

Well, to fate he rendered up his destinies.

CREON

Let him now pay forfeit in his burial too.

ANTIGONE

What crime did he commit in coming to claim his heritage?

CREON

Be very sure of this, yon man shall have no burial.

ANTIGONE

I will bury him, although the state forbids.

CREON

Do so, and thou wilt be making thy own grave by his.

ANTIGONE

A noble end, for two so near and dear to be laid side by side!

CREON (*to his servants*)
Ho! seize and bear her within the palace.

ANTIGONE
Never! for I will not loose my hold upon this corpse.

CREON
Heaven's decrees, girl, fit not thy fancies.

ANTIGONE
Decrees! here is another, "No insult to the dead."

CREON
Be sure that none shall sprinkle over the corpse the moistened dust.

ANTIGONE
O Creon, by my mother's corpse, by Jocasta, I implore thee!

CREON
'Tis but lost labour; thou wilt not gain thy prayer.

ANTIGONE
Let me but bathe the dead body—

CREON
Nay, that would be part of what the city is forbidden.

ANTIGONE
At least let me bandage the gaping wounds.

CREON
No; thou shalt never pay honour to this corpse.

ANTIGONE
O my darling! one kiss at least will I print upon thy lips.

CREON
Do not let this mourning bring disaster on thy marriage.

ANTIGONE
Marriage! dost think I will live to wed thy son?

CREON
Most certainly thou must; how wilt thou escape his bed?

ANTIGONE
Then if I must, our wedding-night will find another Danaid bride in me.

CREON (*turning to* OEDIPUS)
Dost witness how boldly she reproached me?

ANTIGONE
Witness this steel, the sword by which I swear!

CREON
Why art so bent on being released from this marriage?

ANTIGONE
I mean to share my hapless father's exile.

CREON
A noble spirit thine but somewhat touched with folly.

ANTIGONE
Likewise will I share his death, I tell thee further.

CREON
Go, leave the land; thou shalt not murder son of mine.
(CREON *goes out, followed by his attendants who carry with them the body of* MENOECEUS.)

OEDIPUS
Daughter, for this loyal spirit I thank thee.

ANTIGONE
Were I to wed, then thou, my father, wouldst be alone in thy exile.

OEDIPUS
Abide here and be happy; I will bear my own load of sorrow.

ANTIGONE
And who shall tend thee in thy blindness, father?

OEDIPUS
Where fate appoints, there will I lay me down upon the ground.

ANTIGONE
Where is now the famous Oedipus, where that famous riddle?

OEDIPUS
Lost for ever! one day made, and one day marred my fortune.

ANTIGONE
May not I too share thy sorrows?

OEDIPUS
To wander with her blinded sire were shame unto his child.

ANTIGONE
Not so, father, but glory rather, if she be a maid discreet.

OEDIPUS
Lead me nigh that I may touch thy mother's corpse.

ANTIGONE
So! embrace the aged form so dear to thee.

OEDIPUS
Woe is thee, thy motherhood, thy marriage most unblest!

ANTIGONE
A piteous corpse, a prey to every ill at once!

OEDIPUS
Where lies the corpse of Eteocles, and of Polyneices, where?

ANTIGONE
Both lie stretched before thee, side by side.

OEDIPUS
Lay the blind man's hand upon his poor sons' brows.

ANTIGONE
There then! touch the dead, thy children.

OEDIPUS
Woe for you! dear fallen sons, sad offspring of a sire as sad!

ANTIGONE
O my brother Polyneices, name most dear to me!

OEDIPUS
Now is the oracle of Loxias being fulfilled, my child.

ANTIGONE
What oracle was that? canst thou have further woes to tell?

OEDIPUS
That I should die in glorious Athens after a life of wandering.

ANTIGONE
Where? what fenced town in Attica will take thee in?

OEDIPUS

Hallowed Colonus, home of the god of steeds. Come then, attend on thy blind father, since thou art minded to share his exile.

(OEDIPUS *and* ANTIGONE *chant their remaining lines as they slowly depart.*)

ANTIGONE

To wretched exile go thy way; stretch forth thy hand, my aged sire, taking me to guide thee, like a breeze that speedeth barques.

OEDIPUS

See, daughter, I am advancing; be thou my guide, poor child.

ANTIGONE

Ah, poor indeed! the saddest maid of all in Thebes.

OEDIPUS

Where am I planting my aged step? Bring my staff, child.

ANTIGONE

This way, this way, father mine! plant thy footsteps here, like a dream for all the strength thou hast.

OEDIPUS

Woe unto thee that art driving my aged limbs in grievous exile from their land! Ah me! the sorrows I endure!

ANTIGONE

"Endure"! why speak of enduring? Justice regardeth not the sinner and requiteth not men's follies.

OEDIPUS

I am he whose name passed into high songs of victory because I guessed the maiden's baffling riddle.

ANTIGONE

Thou art bringing up again the reproach of the Sphinx. Talk no more of past success. This misery was in store for thee all the while, to become an exile from thy country and die thou knowest not where; while I, bequeathing to my girlish friends tears of sad regret, must go forth from my native land, roaming as no maiden ought.

Ah! this dutiful resolve will crown me with glory in respect of my father's sufferings. Woe is me for the insults heaped on thee and on my brother whose dead body is cast forth from the palace unburied; poor boy! I will yet bury him secretly, though I have to die for it, father.

OEDIPUS

To thy companions show thyself.

ANTIGONE

My own laments suffice.

OEDIPUS

Go pray then at the altars.

ANTIGONE

They are weary of my piteous tale.

OEDIPUS

At least go seek the Bromian god in his hallowed haunt amongst the Maenads' hills.

ANTIGONE

Offering homage that is no homage in Heaven's eyes to him in whose honour I once fringed my dress with the Theban fawn-skin and led the dance upon the hills for the holy choir of Semele?

OEDIPUS

My noble fellow-countrymen, behold me; I am Oedipus, who solved the famous riddle, and once was first of men, I who alone cut short the murderous Sphinx's tyranny am now myself expelled the land in shame and misery. Go to; why make this moan and bootless lamentation? Weak mortal as I am, I must endure the fate that God decrees.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Hail! majestic Victory! keep thou my life nor ever cease to crown my song! [6]

COLERIDGE'S translation has been slightly altered in the following lines: 198, 199, 268, 341, 429, 499, 585, 610, 729, 875, 888, 889, 1208, 1276, 1307, 1328, 1439, 1440–1441, 1560, 1674.

1. The reference is to a spot in Argolis where Poseidon struck the ground with his trident and caused a fountain to appear. He did so because he had become enamoured of Amymone, one of the Danaids, who at the time was searching for water to take to Argos during a drought.

2. Polyneices is alluding to Amphion and Zethus, the Theban Dioscuri.

3. This seems to be an obvious criticism of the corresponding passage in Aeschylus' *The Seven Against Thebes*.

4. The following passages may be compared with the sacrifice of Polyxena in the *Hecuba* and of Macaria in *The Heracleidae*. Also cf. the closing scene of the *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

5. Coleridge's note here runs as follows: "This was the signal for the start at the Lampadephoria, an Athenian ceremony at the festivals of the fire-gods Prometheus, Hephaestus, and Athena."

6. Cf. the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, note 3.

XVI
THE BACCHAE

Characters in the Play

Dionysus, the God; *son of Zeus and of the Theban princess Semele*
Cadmus, *formerly King of Thebes, father of Semele*
Pentheus, *King of Thebes, grandson of Cadmus*
Agave, *daughter of Cadmus, mother of Pentheus*
Teiresias, *an aged Theban prophet*
A Soldier of Pentheus' Guard
Two Messengers
A Chorus of Inspired Damsels, *following Dionysus from the East*

INTRODUCTION

SOMETIME between the production of the *Orestes* in 408 B.C. and Euripides' death in 407–406 B.C., the poet left Athens to go to Macedonia, on the invitation of King Archelaus. There seems to be little doubt that he departed from his once beloved city in a spirit of disillusionment and despair. The great Athens to which he had been so devoted and of which he had been so proud in earlier days, had crumbled sadly in the later stages of the Peloponnesian War. Euripides had implicitly expressed in *The Trojan Women* his bitter feeling that the integrity of Athens had somehow become tainted. The same feeling of disillusionment manifests itself in the last play he wrote, *The Bacchae,* composed during his self-imposed exile, and probably not quite finished at his death. It seems not to have been produced in Athens before 405 B.C.

In *The Bacchae* Euripides turns his attention directly to the question of religion. It is generally supposed that in Macedonia he had an opportunity to witness first hand the wild and orgiastic worship of the god, Dionysus, and all its attendant ritual mysticism. It was a religion of enthusiasm and intoxication, containing elements of the fertility cult as well as the idea that through participation in the rites the devotee became cleansed of his sins and became mystically one with the god. Likewise a curious kind of animal symbolism pervaded the worship, one important part of which was the sacrifice of a bull, who was in a mystic sense also the god, through whose blood came purification. It is this type of religion which Euripides studies in his play and hence for his material he turns to the myths which explain the origin of the Dionysiac worship.

The myth of Dionysus' birth which Euripides follows in *The Bacchae* recorded that Semele, daughter of the Theban Cadmus, was once loved by Zeus, and asked that the god come to her in his complete majesty. Zeus was bound to grant her wish, appeared to her in a great flash of lightning by which she was consumed. Before she died, however, she gave birth prematurely to Zeus' child whom she was carrying. Zeus saved the life of the child, who was to be the god Dionysus, by opening his own flesh, enclosing and fostering the infant. In due course he brought forth the god, by a mysterious second birth. This second birth was an important

factor in the worship of Dionysus as many allusions to it in *The Bacchae* more than adequately attest.

The god himself speaks the prologue of the play. We learn that Thebes, the native city of the god's mother, Semele, has slighted his worship, and that he has arrived to establish himself as a deity and his religion among the Thebans. We also are informed that Cadmus, the old king, has turned over the royal power to his grandson, Pentheus, who is the son of Agave, a sister of Semele. The dramatic action which follows is rich, strange, and in places horrifying. The Chorus, composed of maidens who are inspired followers of Dionysus, has a more integral connection with the central structure of the play than is apparent in the majority of Euripides' compositions. Not only does the Chorus contribute to the action, but also it sings lyric odes of rare beauty which rank among the greatest to be found in Greek. It is noteworthy as well that these odes are "romantic" in tone, in the sense that they display a delight in and a sensitive awareness of wild nature, qualities which are usually and falsely denied to the Greeks by critics in general.

In *The Bacchae* also are many finished characterizations. The poet portrays almost comically the two old men, Cadmus and Teiresias, who at the outset decide to do reverence to the god, largely on the grounds of wishing to remain on the safe side. Then there is the supremely tragic presentation of Pentheus, who out of the purest motives, brutally attempts to stamp out this new religion as something which is subversive of the best interests of his country. In many ways Pentheus is not unlike Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*. And finally there is the delineation of the god Dionysus, who at the beginning of the play seems to be a great and good divinity but who at the end exhibits what is apparently unmitigated cruelty, his only defence for which is his assertion that all these happenings were decreed by the will of Zeus.

The most notable individual scene of the play occurs when Agave enters, carrying the head of her slain son. No episode in all Greek tragedy has so much stark horror packed into it. Agave is still in the grips of religious transport and in sheer ecstasy of triumph bears her ghastly burden which she believes to be the head of a lion that she and her fellow orgiasts have slain with their bare hands. She regards it as vivid proof of the power of the god that is within them. Gradually her horrified father, Cadmus, brings her to her senses. The dramatic impact is tremendous when at length she fully realizes what she has done. The scene is saved from being completely repelling by the courageous way in which both Cadmus and Agave meet the punishment which the god has put upon them.

The Bacchae is the most difficult of all the Greek tragedies to interpret. For example, the long scene between Pentheus and Dionysus, when the

king finally surrenders to the god, is most puzzling. Murray, in his translation, has presented a most convincing interpretation, when he supposes that Pentheus is gradually being hypnotized by Dionysus. Also there is the extraordinary scene in which the palace is destroyed by an earthquake, or so the text would lead us to believe. Some critics maintain that the destruction is only the reflection of a subjective state in the minds of Dionysus and the Chorus, while others hold that only a part of the palace crashed in ruins, since no character at the end of the play notices anything unusual about the condition of the building. No adequate answer has ever been given to this problem. Again, there are scholars who believe that the "Lydian Stranger" is not Dionysus. This theory seems to be untenable on the ground that much of the magnificent dramatic effect of the first scene between Pentheus and the so-called "Lydian Stranger" would be lost, were the latter not Dionysus in disguise. As Murray has interpreted it, the scene contains dramatic irony which definitely rivals that to be found in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. Lastly, to add to all these other problems, at the end of the play a crucial page or more has unfortunately been lost from the manuscript. This missing section may very well have contained vital information relevant to the drama's central interpretation.

One cannot fail to be impressed by the difference which obtains between Euripides' study of religion in *The Bacchae* and that to be found in the plays of Aeschylus. Euripides has focussed his attention upon man in a religious milieu, and examines him as he is swept by surging emotion and violent religious frenzy. What the poet actually believes or means to communicate must probably remain an enigma. At one moment we feel that he regards religion as the most valuable and important element in man's life, while at another he seems to present it as a curse and an abomination. Perhaps he is asserting that religion is supremely important but that nothing is more terrible than its excesses. Whatever may be its precise interpretation, in this last play critics are right in seeing one of Euripides' greatest artistic creations.

THE BACCHAE

(SCENE:—*The background represents the front of the Castle of* PENTHEUS, *King of Thebes. At one side is visible the sacred Tomb of Semele, a little enclosure overgrown with wild vines, with a cleft in the rocky floor of it from which there issues at times steam or smoke. The God* DIONYSUS *is discovered alone.*)

DIONYSUS

Behold, God's Son is come unto this land
Of Thebes, even I, Dionysus, whom the brand
Of heaven's hot splendour lit to life, when she
Who bore me, Cadmus' daughter Semele,
Died here. So, changed in shape from God to man,
I walk again by Dirce's streams and scan
Ismenus' shore. There by the castle side
I see her place, the Tomb of the Lightning's Bride,
The wreck of smouldering chambers, and the great
Faint wreaths of fire undying—as the hate
Dies not, that Hera held for Semele.
  Aye, Cadmus hath done well; in purity
He keeps this place apart, inviolate,
His daughter's sanctuary; and I have set
My green and clustered vines to robe it round.
  Far now behind me lies the golden ground
Of Lydian and of Phrygian; far away
The wide hot plains where Persian sunbeams play,
The Bactrian war-holds, and the storm-oppressed
Clime of the Mede, and Araby the Blest,
And Asia all, that by the salt sea lies
In proud embattled cities, motley-wise
Of Hellene and Barbarian interwrought;
And now I come to Hellas—having taught
All the world else my dances and my rite

Of mysteries, to show me in men's sight
Manifest God.
And first Hellene lands
I cry this Thebes to waken; set her hands
To clasp my wand, mine ivied javelin,
And round her shoulders hang my wild fawn-skin.
For they have scorned me whom it least beseemed,
Semele's sisters; mocked my birth, nor deemed
That Dionysus sprang from Dian[1] seed.
My mother sinned, said they; and in her need,
With Cadmus plotting, cloaked her human shame
With the dread name of Zeus; for that the flame
From heaven consumed her, seeing she lied to God.
Thus must they vaunt; and therefore hath my rod
On them first fallen, and stung them forth wild-eyed
From empty chambers; the bare mountain side
Is made their home, and all their hearts are flame.
Yea, I have bound upon the necks of them
The harness of my rites. And with them all
The seed of womankind from hut and hall
Of Thebes, hath this my magic goaded out.
And there, with the old King's daughters, in a rout
Confused, they make their dwelling-place between
The roofless rocks and shadowy pine trees green.
Thus shall this Thebes, how sore soe'er it smart,
Learn and forget not, till she crave her part
In mine adoring; thus must I speak clear
To save my mother's fame, and crown me here
As true God, born by Semele to Zeus.

Now Cadmus yieldeth up his throne and use
Of royal honour to his daughter's son
Pentheus; who on my body hath begun
A war with God. He thrusteth me away
From due drink-offering, and, when men pray,
My name entreats not. Therefore on his own
Head and his people's shall my power be shown.
Then to another land, when all things here
Are well, must I fare onward, making clear
My godhead's might. But should this Theban town
Essay with wrath and battle to drag down
My maids, lo, in their path myself shall be,
And maniac armies battled after me!

For this I veil my godhead with the wan
Form of the things that die, and walk as Man.

O Brood of Tmolus o'er the wide world flown,
O Lydian band, my chosen and mine own,
Damsels uplifted o'er the orient deep
To wander where I wander, and to sleep
Where I sleep; up, and wake the old sweet sound,
The clang that I and mystic Rhea found,
The Timbrel of the Mountain! Gather all
Thebes to your song round Pentheus' royal hall.
I seek my new-made worshippers, to guide
Their dances up Cithaeron's pine-clad side.
(*As he departs, there comes stealing in from the left a band of fifteen Eastern Women, the light of the sunrise streaming upon their long white robes and ivy-bound hair. They wear fawn-skins over the robes, and carry some of them timbrels, some pipes and other instruments. Many bear the thyrsus, or sacred Wand, made of reed ringed with ivy. They enter stealthily till they see that the place is empty, and then begin their mystic song of worship.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

A Maiden

From Asia, from the dayspring that uprises,
To Bromios ever glorying we came.
We laboured for our Lord in many guises;
We toiled, but the toil is as the prize is;
Thou Mystery, we hail thee by thy name!

Another

Who lingers in the road? Who espies us?
He shall hide him in his house nor be bold.
Let the heart keep silence that defies us;
For I sing this day to Dionysus
The song that is appointed from of old.

All the Maidens

Oh, blessèd he in all wise,
Who hath drunk the Living Fountain,
Whose life no folly staineth,
And his soul is near to God;

Whose sins are lifted, pall-wise,
As he worships on the Mountain,
And where Cybele ordaineth,
Our Mother, he has trod:

His head with ivy laden
And his thyrsus tossing high,
For our God he lifts his cry;
"Up, O Bacchae, wife and maiden,
Come, O ye Bacchae, come;
Oh, bring the Joy-bestower,
God-seed of God the Sower,
Bring Bromios in his power
From Phrygia's mountain dome;
To street and town and tower,
Oh, bring ye Bromios home!"

Whom erst in anguish lying
For an unborn life's desire,
As a dead thing in the Thunder
His mother cast to earth;
For her heart was dying, dying,
In the white heart of the fire;
Till Zeus, the Lord of Wonder,
Devised new lairs of birth;

Yea, his own flesh tore to hide him,
And with clasps of bitter gold
Did a secret son enfold,
And the Queen knew not beside him,
Till the perfect hour was there;
Then a hornèd God was found,
And a God with serpents crowned;
And for that are serpents wound
In the wands his maidens bear,
And the songs of serpents sound
In the mazes of their hair.

Some Maidens

All hail, O Thebes, thou nurse of Semele!
With Semele's wild ivy crown thy towers;
Oh, burst in bloom of wreathing bryony,
Berries and leaves and flowers;

Uplift the dark divine wand,
The oak-wand and the pine-wand,
And don thy fawn-skin, fringed in purity
With fleecy white, like ours.

Oh, cleanse thee in the wands' waving pride!
Yea, all men shall dance with us and pray,
When Bromios his companies shall guide
Hillward, ever hillward, where they stay,
The flock of the Believing,
The maids from loom and weaving
By the magic of his breath borne away.

Others

Hail thou, O Nurse of Zeus, O Caverned Haunt
Where fierce arms clanged to guard God's cradle rare,
For thee of old some crested Corybant
First woke in Cretan air
The wild orb of our orgies,
Our Timbrel; and thy gorges
Rang with this strain; and blended Phrygian chant
And sweet keen pipes were there.

But the Timbrel, the Timbrel was another's,
And away to Mother Rhea it must wend;
And to our holy singing from the Mother's
The mad Satyrs carried it, to blend
In the dancing and the cheer
Of our third and perfect Year;
And it serves Dionysus in the end!

A Maiden

O glad, glad on the mountains
To swoon in the race outworn,
When the holy fawn-skin clings,
And all else sweeps away,
To the joy of the red quick fountains,
The blood of the hill-goat torn,
The glory of wild-beast ravenings,
Where the hill-tops catch the day;
To the Phrygian, Lydian, mountains!
'Tis Bromios leads the way.

Another Maiden

Then streams the earth with milk, yea, streams
With wines and nectar of the bee,
And through the air dim perfume steams
Of Syrian frankincense; and He,
Our leader, from his thyrsus spray
A torchlight tosses high and higher,
A torchlight like a beacon-fire,
To waken all that faint and stray;
And sets them leaping as he sings,
His tresses rippling to the sky,
And deep beneath the Maenad cry
His proud voice rings:
"Come, O ye Bacchae, come!"

All the Maidens

Hither, O fragrant of Tmolus the Golden,
Come with the voice of timbrel and drum;
Let the cry of your joyance uplift and embolden
The God of the joy-cry; O Bacchanals, come!
With pealing of pipes and with Phrygian clamour,
On, where the vision of holiness thrills,
And the music climbs and the maddening glamour,
With the wild White Maids, to the hills, to the hills!
Oh, then, like a colt as he runs by a river,
A colt by his dam, when the heart of him sings,
With the keen limbs drawn and the fleet foot a-quiver,
Away the Bacchanal springs!

(*Enter* TEIRESIAS. *He is an old man and blind, leaning upon a staff and moving with slow statelmess, though wearing the Ivy and the Bacchic fawn-skin.*)

TEIRESIAS

Ho, there, who keeps the gate?—Go, summon me
Cadmus, Agenor's son, who crossed the sea
From Sidon and upreared this Theban hold.
Go, whosoe'er thou art. See he be told
Teiresias seeketh him. Himself will gauge
Mine errand, and the compact, age with age,
I vowed with him, grey hair with snow-white hair,
To deck the new God's thyrsus, and to wear
His fawn-skin, and with ivy crown our brows.
(*Enter* CADMUS *from the Castle. He is even older than* TEIRESIAS, *and wears the same attire.*)

CADMUS

True friend! I knew that voice of thine, that flows
Like mellow wisdom from a fountain wise.
And, lo, I come prepared, in all the guise
And harness of this God. Are we not told
His is the soul of that dead life of old
That sprang from mine own daughter? Surely then
Must thou and I with all the strength of men
Exalt him.
Where then shall I stand, where tread
The dance and toss this bowed and hoary head?
O friend, in thee is wisdom; guide my grey
And eld-worn steps, eld-worn Teiresias.—Nay:
I am not weak.
(*At the first movement of worship his manner begins to change; a mysterious strength and exaltation enter into him.*)
Surely this arm could smite
The wild earth with its thyrsus, day and night,
And faint not! Sweetly and forgetfully
The dim years fall from off me!

TEIRESIAS

As with thee,
With me 'tis likewise. Light am I and young,
And will essay the dancing and the song.

CADMUS

Quick, then, our chariots to the mountain road.

TEIRESIAS

Nay; to take steeds were to mistrust the God.

CADMUS

So be it. Mine old arms shall guide thee there.

TEIRESIAS

The God himself shall guide! Have thou no care.

CADMUS

And in all Thebes shall no man dance but we?

TEIRESIAS

Aye, Thebes is blinded. Thou and I can see.

CADMUS

'Tis weary waiting; hold my hand, friend; so.

TEIRESIAS

Lo, there is mine. So linkèd let us go.

CADMUS

Shall things of dust the Gods' dark ways despise?

TEIRESIAS

Or prove our wit on Heaven's high mysteries?
Not thou and I! That heritage sublime
Our sires have left us, wisdom old as time,
No word of man, how deep soe'er his thought
And won of subtlest toil, may bring to naught.
Aye, men will rail that I forget my years,
To dance and wreathe with ivy these white hairs;
What recks it? Seeing the God no line hath told
To mark what man shall dance, or young or old;
But craves his honours from mortality
All, no man marked apart; and great shall be!

CADMUS

(*after looking away toward the Mountain*)
Teiresias, since this light thou canst not read,
I must be seer for thee. Here comes in speed
Pentheus, Echion's son, whom I have raised
To rule my people in my stead.—Amazed
He seems. Stand close, and mark what we shall hear.
(*The two stand back, partially concealed, while there enters in hot haste* PENTHEUS, *followed by a bodyguard. He is speaking to the* SOLDIER *in command.*)

PENTHEUS

Scarce had I crossed our borders, when mine ear
Was caught by this strange rumour, that our own
Wives, our own sisters, from their hearths are flown
To wild and secret rites; and cluster there
High on the shadowy hills, with dance and prayer
To adore this new-made God, this Dionyse,
Whate'er he be!—And in their companies
Deep wine-jars stand, and ever and anon
Away into the loneliness now one
Steals forth, and now a second, maid or dame,
Where love lies waiting, not of God! The flame,
They say, of Bacchios wraps them. Bacchios! Nay,

'Tis more to Aphrodite that they pray.
Howbeit, all that I have found, my men
Hold bound and shackled in our dungeon den;
The rest, I will go hunt them! Aye, and snare
My birds with nets of iron, to quell their prayer
And mountain song and rites of rascaldom!
They tell me, too, there is a stranger come,
A man of charm and spell, from Lydian seas,
A head all gold and cloudy fragrancies,
A wine-red cheek, and eyes that hold the light
Of the very Cyprian. Day and livelong night
He haunts amid the damsels, o'er each lip
Dangling his cup of joyance!—Let me grip
Him once, but once, within these walls, right swift
That wand shall cease its music, and that drift
Of tossing curls lie still—when my rude sword
Falls between neck and trunk! 'Tis all his word,
This tale of Dionysus; how that same
Babe that was blasted by the lightning flame
With his dead mother, for that mother's lie,
Was re-conceived, born perfect from the thigh
Of Zeus, and now is God! What call ye these?
Dreams? Gibes of the unknown wanderer? Blasphemies
That crave the very gibbet?
Stay! God wot,
Here is another marvel! See I not
In motley fawn-skins robed the vision-seer
Teiresias? And my mother's father here—
O depth of scorn!—adoring with the wand
Of Bacchios?—Father!—Nay, mine eyes are fond;
It is not your white heads so fancy-flown!
It cannot be! Cast off that ivy crown,
O mine own mother's sire! Set free that hand
That cowers about its staff.
'Tis thou hast planned
This work, Teiresias! 'Tis thou must set
Another altar and another yet
Amongst us, watch new birds, and win more hire
Of gold, interpreting new signs of fire!
But for thy silver hairs, I tell thee true,
Thou now wert sitting chained amid thy crew
Of raving damsels, for this evil dream
Thou hast brought us, of new Gods! When once the gleam

Of grapes hath lit a Woman's Festival,
In all their prayers is no more health at all!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
(*the words are not heard by* PENTHEUS)

Injurious King, hast thou no care for God,
Nor Cadmus, sower of the Giants' Sod,[2]
Life-spring to great Echion and to thee?

TEIRESIAS

Good words, my son, come easily, when he
That speaks is wise, and speaks but for the right.
Else come they never! Swift are thine, and bright
As though with thought, yet have no thought at all.
Lo, this new God, whom thou dost flout withal,
I cannot speak the greatness wherewith He
In Hellas shall be great! Two spirits there be,
Young Prince, that in man's world are first of worth.
Demeter one is named; she is the Earth—
Call her which name thou will!—who feeds man's frame
With sustenance of things dry. And that which came
Her work to perfect, second, is the Power
From Semele born. He found the liquid shower
Hid in the grape. He rests man's spirit dim
From grieving, when the vine exalteth him.
He giveth sleep to sink the fretful day
In cool forgetting. Is there any way
With man's sore heart, save only to forget?
Yea, being God, the blood of him is set
Before the Gods in sacrifice, that we
For his sake may be blest.—And so, to thee,
That fable shames him, how this God was knit
Into God's flesh? Nay, learn the truth of it,
Cleared from the false.—When from that deadly light
Zeus saved the babe, and up to Olympus' height
Raised him, and Hera's wrath would cast him thence,
Then Zeus devised him a divine defence.
A fragment of the world-encircling fire [3]
He rent apart, and wrought to his desire
Of shape and hue, in the image of the child,
And gave to Hera's rage. And so, beguiled
By change and passing time, this tale was born,
How the babe-god was hidden in the torn

Flesh of his sire. He hath no shame thereby.
A prophet is he likewise. Prophecy
Cleaves to all frenzy, but beyond all else
To frenzy of prayer. Then in us verily dwells
The God himself, and speaks the thing to be.
Yea, and of Ares' realm a part hath he.
When mortal armies, mailèd and arrayed,
Have in strange fear, or ever blade met blade,
Fled maddened, 'tis this God hath palsied them.
Aye, over Delphi's rock-built diadem
Thou yet shalt see him leaping with his train
Of fire across the twin-peaked mountain-plain,
Flaming the darkness with his mystic wand,
And great in Hellas.—List and understand,
King Pentheus! Dream not thou that force is power;
Nor, if thou hast a thought, and that thought sour
And sick, oh, dream not thought is wisdom!—Up,
Receive this God to Thebes; pour forth the cup
Of sacrifice, and pray, and wreathe thy brow.
Thou fearest for the damsels? Think thee now;
How toucheth this the part of Dionyse
To hold maids pure perforce? In them it lies,
And their own hearts; and in the wildest rite
Cometh no stain to her whose heart is white.
Nay, mark me! Thou hast thy joy, when the Gate
Stands thronged, and Pentheus' name is lifted great
And high by Thebes in clamour; shall not He
Rejoice in his due meed of majesty?
Howbeit, this Cadmus whom thou scorn'st and I
Will wear His crown, and tread His dances! Aye,
Our hairs are white, yet shall that dance be trod!
I will not lift mine arm to war with God
For thee nor all thy words. Madness most fell
Is on thee, madness wrought by some dread spell,
But not by spell nor leechcraft to be cured!

CHORUS

Grey prophet, worthy of Phoebus is thy word,
And wise in honouring Bromios, our great God.

CADMUS

My son, right well Teiresias points thy road.
Oh, make thine habitation here with us,
Not lonely, against men's uses. Hazardous

Is this quick bird-like beating of thy thought
Where no thought dwells.—Grant that this God be naught,
Yet let that Naught be Somewhat in thy mouth;
Lie boldly, and say He Is! So north and south
Shall marvel, how there sprang a thing divine
From Semele's flesh, and honour all our line.
(*Drawing nearer to* PENTHEUS)
Is there not blood before thine eyes even now?
Our lost Actaeon's blood, whom long ago
His own red hounds through yonder forest dim
Tore unto death, because he vaunted him
Against most holy Artemis? Oh, beware,
And let me wreathe thy temples. Make thy prayer
With us, and walk thee humbly in God's sight.
(*He makes as if to set the wreath on* PENTHEUS' *head.*)

PENTHEUS

Down with that hand! Aroint thee to thy rite,
Nor smear on me thy foul contagion!
(*Turning upon* TEIRESIAS)
This
Thy folly's head and prompter shall not miss
The justice that he needs!—Go, half my guard,
Forth to the rock-seat where he dwells in ward
O'er birds and wonders; rend the stone with crow
And trident; make one wreck of high and low,
And toss his bands to all the winds of air!
Ha, have I found the way to sting thee, there?
The rest, forth through the town! And seek amain
This girl-faced stranger, that hath wrought such bane
To all Thebes, preying on our maids and wives.
Seek till ye find; and lead him here in gyves,
Till he be judged and stoned, and weep in blood
The day he troubled Pentheus with his God!
(*The guards set forth in two bodies;* PENTHEUS *goes into the Castle.*)

TEIRESIAS

Hard heart, how little dost thou know what seed
Thou sowest! Blind before, and now indeed
Most mad!—Come, Cadmus, let us go our way,
And pray for this our persecutor, pray
For this poor city, that the righteous God

Move not in anger.—Take thine ivy rod
And help my steps, as I help thine. 'Twere ill,
If two old men should fall by the roadway. Still,
Come what come may, our service shall be done
To Bacchios, the All-Father's mystic son.
O Pentheus, named of sorrow! [4] Shall he claim
From all thy house fulfilment of his name,
Old Cadmus?—Nay, I speak not from mine art,
But as I see—blind words and a blind heart!

(*The two Old Men go off towards the Mountain.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Some Maidens

Thou Immaculate on high;
Thou Recording Purity;
Thou that stoopest, Golden Wing,
Earthward, manward, pitying,
Hearest thou this angry King?
Hearest thou the rage and scorn
'Gainst the Lord of Many Voices,
Him of mortal mother born,
Him in whom man's heart rejoices,
Girt with garlands and with glee,
First in Heaven's sovranty?
For his kingdom, it is there,
In the dancing and the prayer,
In the music and the laughter,
In the vanishing of care,
And of all before and after;
In the Gods' high banquet, when
Gleams the grape-blood, flashed to heaven;
Yea, and in the feasts of men
Comes his crownèd slumber; then
Pain is dead and hate forgiven!

Others

Loose thy lips from out the rein;
Lift thy wisdom to disdain;
Whatso law thou canst not see,
Scorning; so the end shall be
Uttermost calamity!
'Tis the life of quiet breath,
'Tis the simple and the true,

Storm nor earthquake shattereth,
Nor shall aught the house undo
Where they dwell. For, far away,
Hidden from the eyes of day,
Watchers are there in the skies,
That can see man's life, and prize
Deeds well done by things of clay.
But the world's Wise are not wise,
Claiming more than mortal may.
Life is such a little thing;
Lo, their present is departed,
And the dreams to which they cling
Come not. Mad imagining
Theirs, I ween, and empty-hearted!

Divers Maidens

Where is the Home for me?
O Cyprus, set in the sea,
Aphrodite's home in the soft sea-foam,
Would I could wend to thee;
Where the wings of the Loves are furled,
And faint the heart of the world.

Aye, unto Paphos' isle,
Where the rainless meadows smile
With riches rolled from the hundred-fold
Mouths of the far-off Nile,
Streaming beneath the waves
To the roots of the seaward caves.

But a better land is there
Where Olympus cleaves the air,
The high still dell where the Muses dwell,
Fairest of all things fair!
O there is Grace, and there is the Heart's Desire,
And peace to adore thee, thou Spirit of Guiding Fire!
A God of Heaven is he,
And born in majesty;
Yet hath he mirth in the joy of the Earth,
And he loveth constantly
Her who brings increase,
The Feeder of Children, Peace.
No grudge hath he of the great;

No scorn of the mean estate;
But to all that liveth His wine he giveth,
Griefless, immaculate;
Only on them that spurn
Joy, may his anger burn.

Love thou the Day and the Night;
Be glad of the Dark and the Light;
And avert thine eyes from the lore of the wise,
That have honour in proud men's sight.
The simple nameless herd of Humanity
Hath deeds and faith that art truth enough for me!

(*As the Chorus ceases, a party of the guards return, leading in the midst of them* DIONYSUS, *bound. The* SOLDIER *in command stands forth, as* PENTHEUS, *hearing the tramp of feet, comes out from the Castle.*)

SOLDIER

Our quest is finished, and thy prey, O King,
Caught; for the chase was swift, and this wild thing
Most tame; yet never flinched, nor thought to flee,
But held both hands out unresistingly—
No change, no blanching of the wine-red cheek.
He waited while we came, and bade us wreak
All thy decree; yea, laughed, and made my hest
Easy, till I for very shame confessed
And said: 'O stranger, not of mine own will
I bind thee, but his bidding to fulfil
Who sent me.'
And those prisoned Maids withal
Whom thou didst seize and bind within the wall
Of thy great dungeon, they are fled, O King,
Free in the woods, a-dance and glorying
To Bromios. Of their own impulse fell
To earth, men say, fetter and manacle,
And bars slid back untouched of mortal hand.
Yea, full of many wonders to thy land
Is this man come. . . . Howbeit, it lies with thee!

PENTHEUS

Ye are mad!—Unhand him. Howso swift he be,
My toils are round him and he shall not fly.
(*The guards loose the arms of* DIONYSUS; PENTHEUS *studies him*

for a while in silence, then speaks jeeringly. DIONYSUS *remains gentle and unafraid.*)

Marry, a fair shape for a woman's eye,
Sir stranger! And thou seek'st no more, I ween!
Long curls, withal! That shows thou ne'er hast been
A wrestler!—down both cheeks so softly tossed
And winsome! And a white skin! It hath cost
Thee pains, to please thy damsels with this white
And red of cheeks that never face the light!

(DIONYSUS *is silent.*)

Speak, sirrah; tell me first thy name and race.

DIONYSUS

No glory is therein, nor yet disgrace.
Thou hast heard of Tmolus, the bright hill of flowers?

PENTHEUS

Surely; the ridge that winds by Sardis' towers.

DIONYSUS

Thence am I; Lydia was my fatherland.

PENTHEUS

And whence these revelations, that thy band
Spreadeth in Hellas?

DIONYSUS

Their intent and use
Dionysus oped to me, the Child of Zeus.

PENTHEUS (*brutally*)

Is there a Zeus there, that can still beget
Young Gods?

DIONYSUS

Nay, only He whose seal was set
Here in thy Thebes on Semele.

PENTHEUS

What way
Descended he upon thee? In full day
Or vision of night?

DIONYSUS

Most clear he stood, and scanned
My soul, and gave his emblems to mine hand.

PENTHEUS
What like be they, these emblems?

DIONYSUS
That may none
Reveal, nor know, save his Elect alone.

PENTHEUS
And what good bring they to the worshipper?

DIONYSUS
Good beyond price, but not for thee to hear.

PENTHEUS
Thou trickster! Thou wouldst prick me on the more
To seek them out!

DIONYSUS
His mysteries abhor
The touch of sin-lovers.

PENTHEUS
And so thine eyes
Saw this God plain; what guise had he?

DIONYSUS
What guise
It liked him. 'Twas not I ordained his shape.

PENTHEUS
Aye, deftly turned again. An idle jape,
And nothing answered!

DIONYSUS
Wise words being brought
To blinded eyes will seem as things of nought.

PENTHEUS
And comest thou first to Thebes, to have thy God
Established?

DIONYSUS
Nay; all Barbary hath trod
His dance ere this.

PENTHEUS
A low blind folk, I ween,
Beside our Hellenes'

DIONYSUS
Higher and more keen
In this thing, though their ways are not thy way.

PENTHEUS
How is thy worship held, by night or day?

DIONYSUS
Most oft by night; 'tis a majestic thing,
The darkness.

PENTHEUS
Ha! with women worshipping?
'Tis craft and rottenness!

DIONYSUS
By day no less,
Whoso will seek may find unholiness.

PENTHEUS
Enough! Thy doom is fixed, for false pretence
Corrupting Thebes.

DIONYSUS
Not mine; but thine, for dense
Blindness of heart, and for blaspheming God!

PENTHEUS
A ready knave it is, and brazen-browed.
This mystery-priest!

DIONYSUS
Come, say what it shall be,
My doom; what dire thing wilt thou do to me?

PENTHEUS
First, shear that delicate curl that dangles there.
(*He beckons to the soldiers, who approach* DIONYSUS.)

DIONYSUS
I have vowed it to my God; 'tis holy hair.
(*The soldiers cut off the tress.*)

PENTHEUS
Next, yield me up thy staff!

DIONYSUS

Raise thine own hand
To take it. This is Dionysus' wand.
(PENTHEUS *takes the staff.*)

PENTHEUS

Last, I will hold thee prisoned here.

DIONYSUS

My Lord
God will unloose me, when I speak the word.

PENTHEUS

He may, if e'er again amid his bands
Of saints he hears thy voice!

DIONYSUS

Even now he stands
Close here, and sees all that I suffer.

PENTHEUS

What?
Where is he? For mine eyes discern him not.

DIONYSUS

Where I am! 'Tis thine own impurity
That veils him from thee.

PENTHEUS

The dog jeers at me!
At me and Thebes! Bind him!
(*The soldiers begin to bind him.*)

DIONYSUS

I charge ye, bind
Me not! I having vision and ye blind!

PENTHEUS

And I, with better right, say bind the more!
(*The soldiers obey.*)

DIONYSUS

Thou knowest not what end thou seekest, nor
What deed thou doest, nor what man thou art!

PENTHEUS (*mocking*)

Agave's son, and on the father's part
Echion's, hight Pentheus!

DIONYSUS

So let it be,
A name fore-written to calamity!

PENTHEUS

Away, and tie him where the steeds are tied:
Aye, let him lie in the manger!—There abide
And stare into the darkness!—And this rout
Of womankind that clusters thee about,
Thy ministers of worship, are my slaves!
It may be I will sell them o'er the waves,
Hither and thither; else they shall be set
To labour at my distaffs, and forget
Their timbrel and their songs of dawning day!

DIONYSUS

I go; for that which may not be, I may
Not suffer! Yet for this thy sin, lo, He
Whom thou deniest cometh after thee
For recompense. Yea, in thy wrong to us,
Thou hast cast Him into thy prison-house!

(DIONYSUS, *without his wand, his hair shorn, and his arms tightly bound, is led off by the guards to his dungeon.* PENTHEUS *returns into the Palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Some Maidens

Achelous' roaming daughter,
Holy Dirce, virgin water,
Bathed he not of old in thee,
The Babe of God, the Mystery?
When from out the fire immortal
To himself his God did take him,
To his own flesh, and bespake him:
"Enter now life's second portal,
Motherless Mystery; lo, I break
Mine own body for thy sake,
Thou of the Twofold Door, and seal thee
Mine, O Bromios,"—thus he spake—
"And to this thy land reveal thee"

All

Still my prayer towards thee quivers,
Dirce, still to thee I hie me;
Why, O Blessèd among Rivers,
Wilt thou fly me and deny me?
By his own joy I vow,
By the grape upon the bough,
Thou shalt seek Him in the midnight, thou shalt love Him, even now!

Other Maidens

Dark and of the dark impassioned
Is this Pentheus' blood; yea, fashioned
Of the Dragon, and his birth
From Echion, child of Earth.
He is no man, but a wonder;
Did the Earth-Child not beget him,
As a red Giant, to set him
Against God, against the Thunder?
He will bind me for his prize,
Me, the Bride of Dionyse;
And my priest, my friend, is taken
Even now, and buried lies;
In the dark he lies forsaken!

All

Lo, we race with death, we perish,
Dionysus, here before thee!
Dost thou mark us not, nor cherish,
Who implore thee, and adore thee?
Hither down Olympus' side,
Come, O Holy One defied,
Be thy golden wand uplifted o'er the tyrant in his pride!

A Maiden

Oh, where art thou? In thine own
Nysa, thou our help alone?
O'er fierce beasts in orient lands
Doth thy thronging thyrsus wave,
By the high Corycian Cave,
Or where stern Olympus stands;
In the elm-woods and the oaken,
There where Orpheus harped of old,
And the trees awoke and knew him,

And the wild things gathered to him,
As he sang amid the broken
Glens his music manifold?
Blessed Land of Pierie,
Dionysus loveth thee;
He will come to thee with dancing,
Come with joy and mystery;
With the Maenads at his hest
Winding, winding to the West;
Cross the flood of swiftly glancing
Axios in majesty;
Cross the Lydias, the giver
Of good gifts and waving green;
Cross that Father-Stream of story,
Through a land of steeds and glory
Rolling, bravest, fairest River
E'er of mortals seen!

A Voice Within

Io! Io!
Awake, ye damsels; hear my cry,
Calling my Chosen; hearken ye!

A Maiden

Who speaketh? Oh, what echoes thus?

Another

A Voice, a Voice, that calleth us!

The Voice

Be of good cheer! Lo, it is I,
The Child of Zeus and Semele.

A Maiden

O Master, Master, it is Thou!

Another

O Holy Voice, be with us now!

The Voice

Spirit of the Chained Earthquake,
Hear my word; awake, awake!
(*An Earthquake suddenly shakes the pillars of the Castle.*)

A MAIDEN

Ha! what is coming? Shall the hall
Of Pentheus racked in ruin fall?

LEADER

Our God is in the house! Ye maids adore Him!

CHORUS

We adore Him all!

THE VOICE

Unveil the Lightning's eye; arouse
The fire that sleeps, against this house!
(*Fire leaps up on the Tomb of Semele.*)

A MAIDEN

Ah, saw ye, marked ye there the flame
From Semele's enhallowed sod
Awakened? Yea, the Death that came
Ablaze from heaven of old, the same
Hot splendour of the shaft of God?

LEADER

Oh, cast ye, cast ye, to the earth! The Lord
Cometh against this house! Oh, cast ye down,
Ye trembling damsels; He, our own adored,
God's Child hath come, and all is overthrown!
(*The Maidens cast themselves upon the ground, their eyes earthward.* DIONYSUS, *alone and unbound, enters from the Castle.*)

DIONYSUS

Ye Damsels of the Morning Hills,[6] why lie ye thus dismayed?
Ye marked him, then, our Master, and the mighty hand he laid
On tower and rock, shaking the house of Pentheus?—But arise,
And cast the trembling from your flesh, and lift untroubled eyes.

LEADER

O Light in Darkness, is it thou? O Priest, is this thy face?
My heart leaps out to greet thee from the deep of loneliness.

DIONYSUS

Fell ye so quick despairing, when beneath the Gate I passed?
Should the gates of Pentheus quell me, or his darkness make me fast?

LEADER

Oh, what was left if thou wert gone? What could I but despair?
How hast thou 'scaped the man of sin? Who freed thee from the snare?

DIONYSUS

I had no pain nor peril; 'twas mine own hand set me free.

LEADER

Thine arms were gyvèd!

DIONYSUS

Nay, no gyve, no touch, was laid on me!
'Twas there I mocked him, in his gyves, and gave him dreams for food.
For when he led me down, behold, before the stall there stood
A Bull of Offering. And this King, he bit his lips, and straight
Fell on and bound it, hoof and limb, with gasping wrath and sweat.
And I sat watching!—Then a Voice; and lo, our Lord was come,
And the house shook, and a great flame stood o'er his mother's tomb.
And Pentheus hied this way and that, and called his thralls amain
For water, lest his roof-tree burn; and all toiled, all in vain.
Then deemed a-sudden I was gone; and left his fire, and sped
Back to the prison portals, and his lifted sword shone red.
But there, methinks, the God had wrought—I speak but as I guess—
Some dream-shape in mine image; for he smote at emptiness,
Stabbed in the air, and strove in wrath, as though 'twere me he slew
Then 'mid his dreams God smote him yet again! He overthrew
All that high house. And there in wreck for evermore it lies,
That the day of this my bondage may be sore in Pentheus' eyes!
And now his sword is fallen, and he lies outworn and wan
Who dared to rise against his God in wrath, being but man.
And I uprose and left him, and in all peace took my path
Forth to my Chosen, recking light of Pentheus and his wrath
But soft, methinks a footstep sounds even now within the hall;
'Tis he; how think ye he will stand, and what words speak withal?
I will endure him gently, though he come in fury hot.
For still are the ways of Wisdom, and her temper trembleth not!

(*Enter* PENTHEUS *in fury*)

PENTHEUS

It is too much! This Eastern knave hath slipped
His prison, whom I held but now, hard gripped
In bondage.—Ha! 'Tis he!—What, sirrah, how
Show'st thou before my portals?

(*He advances furiously upon him.*)

DIONYSUS

Softly thou!
And set a quiet carriage to thy rage.

PENTHEUS

How comest thou here? How didst thou break thy cage?
Speak!

DIONYSUS

Said I not, or didst thou mark not me,
There was One living that should set me free?

PENTHEUS

Who? Ever wilder are these tales of thine.

DIONYSUS

He who first made for man the clustered vine.

PENTHEUS

I scorn him and his vines!

DIONYSUS

For Dionyse
'Tis well; for in thy scorn his glory lies.

PENTHEUS (*to his guard*)

Go swift to all the towers, and bar withal
Each gate!

DIONYSUS

What, cannot God o'erleap a wall?

PENTHEUS

Oh, wit thou hast, save where thou needest it!

DIONYSUS

Whereso it most imports, there is my wit!—
Nay, peace! Abide till he who hasteth from
The mountain side with news for thee, be come
We will not fly, but wait on thy command.
(*Enter suddenly and in haste a Messenger from the Mountain*)

MESSENGER

Great Pentheus, Lord of all this Theban land,
I come from high Cithaeron, where the frore
Snow spangles gleam and cease not evermore. . . .

PENTHEUS

And what of import may thy coming bring?

MESSENGER

I have seen the Wild White Women there, O King,
Whose fleet limbs darted arrow-like but now
From Thebes away, and come to tell thee how
They work strange deeds and passing marvel. Yet
I first would learn thy pleasure. Shall I set
My whole tale forth, or veil the stranger part?
Yea, Lord, I fear the swiftness of thy heart,
Thine edgèd wrath and more than royal soul.

PENTHEUS

Thy tale shall nothing scathe thee.—Tell the whole.
It skills not to be wroth with honesty.
Nay, if thy news of them be dark, 'tis he
Shall pay it, who bewitched and led them on.

MESSENGER

Our herded kine were moving in the dawn
Up to the peaks, the greyest, coldest time,
When the first rays steal earthward, and the rime
Yields, when I saw three bands of them. The one
Autonoe led, one Ino, one thine own
Mother, Agave. There beneath the trees
Sleeping they lay, like wild things flung at ease
In the forest; one half sinking on a bed
Of deep pine greenery; one with careless head
Amid the fallen oak leaves; all most cold
In purity—not as thy tale was told
Of wine-cups and wild music and the chase
For love amid the forest's loneliness.
Then rose the Queen Agave suddenly
Amid her band, and gave the God's wild cry,
"Awake, ye Bacchanals! I hear the sound
Of hornèd kine. Awake ye!"—Then, all round,
Alert, the warm sleep fallen from their eyes,
A marvel of swift ranks I saw them rise,
Dames young and old, and gentle maids unwed
Among them. O'er their shoulders first they shed
Their tresses, and caught up the fallen fold
Of mantles where some clasp had loosened hold,
And girt the dappled fawn-skins in with long

Quick snakes that hissed and writhed with quivering tongue.
And one a young fawn held, and one a wild
Wolf cub, and fed them with white milk, and smiled
In love, young mothers with a mother's breast
And babes at home forgotten! Then they pressed
Wreathed ivy round their brows, and oaken sprays
And flowering bryony. And one would raise
Her wand and smite the rock, and straight a jet
Of quick bright water came. Another set
Her thyrsus in the bosomed earth, and there
Was red wine that the God sent up to her,
A darkling fountain. And if any lips
Sought whiter draughts, with dipping finger-tips
They pressed the sod, and gushing from the ground
Came springs of milk. And reed-wands ivy-crowned
Ran with sweet honey, drop by drop.—O King,
Hadst thou been there, as I, and seen this thing,
With prayer and most high wonder hadst thou gone
To adore this God whom now thou rail'st upon!
Howbeit, the kine-wardens and shepherds straight
Came to one place, amazed, and held debate;
And one being there who walked the streets and scanned
The ways of speech, took lead of them whose hand
Knew but the slow soil and the solemn hill,
And flattering spoke, and asked: "Is it your will,
Masters, we stay the mother of the King,
Agave, from her lawless worshipping,
And win us royal thanks?"—And this seemed good
To all; and through the branching underwood
We hid us, cowering in the leaves. And there
Through the appointed hour they made their prayer
And worship of the Wand, with one accord
Of heart and cry—"Iacchos, Bromios, Lord,
God of God born!"—And all the mountain felt,
And worshipped with them; and the wild things knelt
And ramped and gloried, and the wilderness
Was filled with moving voices and dim stress.
Soon, as it chanced, beside my thicket-close
The Queen herself passed dancing, and I rose
And sprang to seize her. But she turned her face
Upon me: "Ho, my rovers of the chase,
My wild White Hounds, we are hunted! Up, each rod
And follow, follow, for our Lord and God!"

Thereat, for fear they tear us, all we fled
Amazed; and on, with hand unweaponèd
They swept towards our herds that browsed the green
Hill grass. Great uddered kine then hadst thou seen
Bellowing in sword-like hands that cleave and tear,
A live steer riven asunder, and the air
Tossed with rent ribs or limbs of cloven tread,
And flesh upon the branches, and a red
Rain from the deep green pines. Yea, bulls of pride,
Horns swift to rage, were fronted and aside
Flung stumbling, by those multitudinous hands
Dragged pitilessly. And swifter were the bands
Of garbèd flesh and bone unbound withal
Than on thy royal eyes the lids may fall.
Then on like birds, by their own speed upborne,
They swept towards the plains of waving corn
That lie beside Asopus' banks, and bring
To Thebes the rich fruit of her harvesting.
On Hysiae and Erythrae that lie nursed
Amid Cithaeron's bowering rocks, they burst
Destroying, as a foeman's army comes.
They caught up little children from their homes,
High on their shoulders, babes unheld, that swayed
And laughed and fell not, all a wreck they made.
Yea, bronze and iron did shatter, and in play
Struck hither and thither, yet no wound had they;
Caught fire from out the hearths, yea, carried hot
Flames in their tresses and were scorchèd not!
The village folk in wrath took spear and sword,
And turned upon the Bacchae. Then, dread Lord,
The wonder was. For spear nor barbèd brand
Could scathe nor touch the damsels; but the Wand,
The soft and wreathèd wand their white hands sped,
Blasted those men and quelled them, and they fled
Dizzily. Sure some God was in these things!
And the holy women back to those strange springs
Returned, that God had sent them when the day
Dawned, on the upper heights; and washed away
The stain of battle. And those girdling snakes
Hissed out to lap the waterdrops from cheeks
And hair and breast.
Therefore I counsel thee,
O King, receive this Spirit, whoe'er he be,

To Thebes in glory. Greatness manifold
Is all about him; and the tale is told
That this is he who first to man did give
The grief-assuaging vine. Oh, let him live;
For if he die, then Love herself is slain,
And nothing joyous in the world again!

LEADER

Albeit I tremble, and scarce may speak my thought
To a king's face, yet will I hide it not.
Dionyse is God, no God more true nor higher!

PENTHEUS

It bursts hard by us, like a smothered fire,
This frenzy of Bacchic women! All my land
Is made their mock.—This needs an iron hand!
Ho, Captain! Quick to the Electran Gate;
Bid gather all my men-at-arms thereat;
Call all that spur the charger, all who know
To wield the orbèd targe or bend the bow:
We march to war!—'Fore God, shall women dare
Such deeds against us? 'Tis too much to bear!

DIONYSUS

Thou mark'st me not, O King, and holdest light
My solemn words; yet, in thine own despite,
I warn thee still. Lift thou not up thy spear
Against a God, but hold thy peace, and fear
His wrath! He will not brook it, if thou fright
His Chosen from the hills of their delight

PENTHEUS

Peace, thou! And if for once thou hast slipped thy chain,
Give thanks!—Or shall I knot thine arms again?

DIONYSUS

Better to yield him prayer and sacrifice
Than kick against the pricks, since Dionyse
Is God, and thou but mortal

PENTHEUS

That will I!
Yea, sacrifice of women's blood, to cry
His name through all Cithaeron!

DIONYSUS

Ye shall fly,
All, and abase your shields of bronzen rim
Before their wands.

PENTHEUS

There is no way with him,
This stranger that so dogs us! Well or ill
I may entreat him, he must babble still!

DIONYSUS

Wait, good my friend! These crooked matters may
Even yet be straightened.
(PENTHEUS *has started as though to seek his army at the gate.*)

PENTHEUS

Aye, if I obey
Mine own slaves' will; how else?

DIONYSUS

Myself will lead
The damsels hither, without sword or steed.

PENTHEUS

How now?—This is some plot against me!

DIONYSUS

What
Dost fear? Only to save thee do I plot.

PENTHEUS

It is some compact ye have made, whereby
To dance these hills for ever!

DIONYSUS

Verily,
That is my compact, plighted with my Lord!

PENTHEUS (*turning from him*)

Ho, armourers! Bring forth my shield and sword!—
And thou, be silent!

DIONYSUS

(*after regarding him fixedly, speaks with resignation*)
Ah!—Have then thy will!
(*He fixes his eyes upon* PENTHEUS *again, while the armourers bring out his armour; then speaks in a tone of command.*)

Man, thou wouldst fain behold them on the hill
Praying!

PENTHEUS

(*who during the rest of this scene, with a few exceptions, simply speaks the thoughts that* DIONYSUS *puts into him, losing power over his own mind*)

That would I, though it cost me all
The gold of Thebes!

DIONYSUS

So much? Thou art quick to fall
To such great longing.

PENTHEUS

(*somewhat bewildered at what he has said*)

Aye; 'twould grieve me much
To see them flown with wine.

DIONYSUS

Yet cravest thou such
A sight as would much grieve thee?

PENTHEUS

Yes; I fain
Would watch, ambushed among the pines.

DIONYSUS

'Twere vain
To hide. They soon will track thee out.

PENTHEUS

Well said!
'Twere best done openly.

DIONYSUS

Wilt thou be led
By me, and try the venture?

PENTHEUS

Aye, indeed!
Lead on. Why should we tarry?

DIONYSUS

First we need
A rich and trailing robe of fine linen
To gird thee.

PENTHEUS

Nay; am I a woman, then,
And no man more?

DIONYSUS

Wouldst have them slay thee dead?
No man may see their mysteries.

PENTHEUS

Well said!—
I marked thy subtle temper long ere now.

DIONYSUS

'Tis Dionyse that prompteth me.

PENTHEUS

And how
Mean'st thou the further plan?

DIONYSUS

First take thy way
Within. I will array thee.

PENTHEUS

What array?
The woman's? Nay, I will not.

DIONYSUS

Doth it change
So soon, all thy desire to see this strange
Adoring?

PENTHEUS

Wait! What garb wilt thou bestow
About me?

DIONYSUS

First a long tress dangling low
Beneath thy shoulders.

PENTHEUS

Aye, and next?

DIONYSUS

The said
Robe, falling to thy feet; and on thine head
A snood.

PENTHEUS
And after? Hast thou aught beyond?

DIONYSUS
Surely; the dappled fawn-skin and the wand.

PENTHEUS (*after a struggle with himself*)
Enough! I cannot wear a robe and snood.

DIONYSUS
Wouldst liefer draw the sword and spill men's blood?

PENTHEUS (*again doubting*)
True, that were evil.—Aye; 'tis best to go
First to some place of watch.

DIONYSUS
Far wiser so,
Than seek by wrath wrath's bitter recompense.

PENTHEUS
What of the city streets? Canst lead me hence
Unseen of any?

DIONYSUS
Lonely and untried
Thy path from hence shall be, and I thy guide!

PENTHEUS
I care for nothing, so these Bacchanals
Triumph not against me! . . . Forward to my halls
Within!—I will ordain what seemeth best.

DIONYSUS
So be it, O King! 'Tis mine to obey thine hest,
Whate'er it be.

PENTHEUS
(*after hesitating once more and waiting*)
Well, I will go—perchance
To march and scatter them with serried lance,
Perchance to take thy plan. . . . I know not yet.
(*Exit* PENTHEUS *into the Castle*)

DIONYSUS
Damsels, the lion walketh to the net!
He finds his Bacchae now, and sees and dies.

And pays for all his sin!—O Dionyse,
This is thine hour and thou not far away.
Grant us our vengeance!—First, O Master, stay
The course of reason in him, and instil
A foam of madness. Let his seeing will,
Which ne'er had stooped to put thy vesture on,
Be darkened, till the deed is lightly done.
Grant likewise that he find through all his streets
Loud scorn, this man of wrath and bitter threats
That made Thebes tremble, led in woman's guise.
I go to fold that robe of sacrifice
On Pentheus, that shall deck him to the dark,
His mother's gift!—So shall he learn and mark
God's true Son, Dionyse, in fulness God,
Most fearful, yet to man most soft of mood.
(*Exit* DIONYSUS, *following* PENTHEUS *into the Castle*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Some Maidens

Will they ever come to me, ever again,
The long long dances,
On through the dark till the dim stars wane?
Shall I feel the dew on my throat, and the stream
Of wind in my hair? Shall our white feet gleam
In the dim expanses?
Oh, feet of a fawn to the greenwood fled,
Alone in the grass and the loveliness;
Leap of the hunted, no more in dread,
Beyond the snares and the deadly press:
Yet a voice still in the distance sounds,
A voice and a fear and a haste of hounds;
O wildly labouring, fiercely fleet,
Onward yet by river and glen . . .
Is it joy or terror, ye storm-swift feet? . . .
To the dear lone lands untroubled of men,
Where no voice sounds, and amid the shadowy green
The little things of the woodland live unseen.

What else is Wisdom? [6] What of man's endeavour
Or God's high grace, so lovely and so great?
To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait;
To hold a hand uplifted over Hate;
And shall not Loveliness be loved for ever?

Others

O Strength of God, slow art thou and still,
Yet failest never!
On them that worship the Ruthless Will,
On them that dream, doth His judgment wait.
Dreams of the proud man, making great
And greater ever,
Things which are not of God. In wide
And devious coverts, hunter-wise,
He coucheth Time's unhasting stride,
Following, following, him whose eyes
Look not to Heaven. For all is vain,
The pulse of the heart, the plot of the brain,
That striveth beyond the laws that live.
And is thy Faith so much to give,
Is it so hard a thing to see,
That the Spirit of God, whate'er it be,
The Law that abides and changes not, ages long,
The Eternal and Nature-born—these things be strong?

What else is Wisdom? What of man's endeavour
Or God's high grace so lovely and so great?
To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait;
To hold a hand uplifted over Hate;
And shall not Loveliness be loved for ever?

LEADER

Happy he, on the weary sea
Who hath fled the tempest and won the haven.
Happy whoso hath risen, free,
Above his striving. For strangely graven
Is the orb of life, that one and another
In gold and power may outpass his brother.
And men in their millions float and flow
And seethe with a million hopes as leaven;
And they win their Will, or they miss their Will,
And the hopes are dead or are pined for still;
But whoe'er can know,
As the long days go,
That To Live is happy, hath found his Heaven!

(*Re-enter* DIONYSUS *from the Castle*)

DIONYSUS

O eye that cravest sights thou must not see,
O heart athirst for that which slakes not! Thee,
Pentheus, I call; forth and be seen, in guise
Of woman, Maenad, saint of Dionyse,
To spy upon His Chosen and thine own
Mother!
(*Enter* PENTHEUS, *clad like a Bacchanal, and strangely excited, a spirit of Bacchic madness overshadowing him*)
Thy shape, methinks, is like to one
Of Cadmus' royal maids!

PENTHEUS

Yea; and mine eye
Is bright! Yon sun shines twofold in the sky,
Thebes twofold and the Wall of Seven Gates. . . .
And is it a Wild Bull this, that walks and waits
Before me? There are horns upon thy brow!
What art thou, man or beast? For surely now
The Bull is on thee!

DIONYSUS

He who erst was wrath,
Goes with us now in gentleness. He hath
Unsealed thine eyes to see what thou shouldst see.

PENTHEUS

Say, stand I not as Ino stands, or she
Who bore me?

DIONYSUS

When I look on thee, it seems
I see their very selves!—But stay: why streams
That lock abroad, not where I laid it, crossed
Under the coif?

PENTHEUS

I did it, as I tossed
My head in dancing, to and fro, and cried
His holy music!

DIONYSUS (*tending him*)

It shall soon be tied
Aright. 'Tis mine to tend thee. . . . Nay, but stand
With head straight.

PENTHEUS

In the hollow of thy hand
I lay me. Deck me as thou wilt.

DIONYSUS

Thy zone
Is loosened likewise; and the folded gown
Not evenly falling to the feet.

PENTHEUS

'Tis so,
By the right foot. But here, methinks, they flow
In one straight line to the heel.

DIONYSUS (*while tending him*)

And if thou prove
Their madness true, aye, more than true, what love
And thanks hast thou for me?

PENTHEUS (*not listening to him*)

In my right hand
Is it, or thus, that I should bear the wand,
To be most like to them?

DIONYSUS

Up let it swing
In the right hand, timed with the right foot's spring. . . .
'Tis well thy heart is changed!

PENTHEUS (*more wildly*)

What strength is this!
Cithaeron's steeps and all that in them is—
How say'st thou?—Could my shoulders lift the whole?

DIONYSUS

Surely thou canst, and if thou wilt! Thy soul,
Being once so sick, now stands as it should stand.

PENTHEUS

Shall it be bars of iron? Or this bare hand
And shoulder to the crags, to wrench them down?

DIONYSUS

Wouldst wreck the Nymphs' wild temples, and the brown
Rocks, where Pan pipes at noonday?

PENTHEUS

Nay; not I!
Force is not well with women. I will lie
Hid in the pine-brake.

DIONYSUS

Even as fits a spy
On holy and fearful things, so shalt thou lie!

PENTHEUS (*with a laugh*)

They lie there now, methinks—the wild birds, caught
By love among the leaves, and fluttering not!

DIONYSUS

It may be. That is what thou goest to see,
Aye, and to trap them—so they trap not thee!

PENTHEUS

Forth through the Thebans' town! I am their king,
Aye, their one Man, seeing I dare this thing!

DIONYSUS

Yea, thou shalt bear their burden, thou alone;
Therefore thy trial awaiteth thee!—But on;
With me into thine ambush shalt thou come
Unscathed; then let another bear thee home!

PENTHEUS

The Queen, my mother.

DIONYSUS

Marked of every eye.

PENTHEUS

For that I go!

DIONYSUS

Thou shalt be borne on high!

PENTHEUS

That were like pride!

DIONYSUS

Thy mother's hands shall share
Thy carrying.

PENTHEUS

Nay; I need not such soft care!

DIONYSUS

So soft?

PENTHEUS

Whate'er it be, I have earned it well!
(*Exit* PENTHEUS *towards the Mountain*)

DIONYSUS

Fell, fell art thou; and to a doom so fell
Thou walkest, that thy name from South to North
Shall shine, a sign for ever!—Reach thou forth
Thine arms, Agave, now, and ye dark-browed
Cadmeian sisters! Greet this prince so proud
To the high ordeal, where save God and me,
None walks unscathed!—The rest this day shall see.
(*Exit* DIONYSUS *following* PENTHEUS)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Some Maidens

O hounds raging and blind,
Up by the mountain road,
Sprites of the maddened mind,
To the wild Maids of God,
Fill with your rage their eyes,
Rage at the rage unblest,
Watching in woman's guise,
The spy upon God's Possessed.

A Bacchanal

Who shall be first, to mark
Eyes in the rock that spy,
Eyes in the pine-tree dark—
Is it his mother?—and cry:
"Lo, what is this that comes,
Haunting, troubling still,
Even in our heights, our homes,
The wild Maids of the Hill?
What flesh bare this child?
Never on woman's breast
Changeling so evil smiled;
Man is he not, but Beast!

Lion-shape of the wild,
Gorgon-breed of the waste!"

All the Chorus

Hither, for doom and deed!
Hither with lifted sword,
Justice, Wrath of the Lord,
Come in our visible need!
Smite till the throat shall bleed,
Smite till the heart shall bleed,
Him the tyrannous, lawless, Godless, Echion's earth-born seed!

Other Maidens

Tyrannously hath he trod;
Marched him, in Law's despite,
Against thy Light, O God,
Yea, and thy Mother's Light;
Girded him, falsely bold,
Blinded in craft, to quell
And by man's violence hold
Things unconquerable.

A Bacchanal

A strait pitiless mind
Is death unto godliness;
And to feel in human kind
Life, and a pain the less.
Knowledge, we are not foes!
I seek thee diligently;
But the world with a great wind blows,
Shining, and not from thee;
Blowing to beautiful things,
On, amid dark and light,
Till Life, through the trammellings
Of Laws that are not the Right,
Breaks, clean and pure, and sings
Glorying to God in the height!

All the Chorus

Hither for doom and deed!
Hither with lifted sword,
Justice, Wrath of the Lord,
Come in our visible need!
Smite till the throat shall bleed,

Smite till the heart shall bleed,
Him the tyrannous, lawless, Godless, Echion's earth-born seed!

LEADER

Appear, appear, whatso thy shape or name
O Mountain Bull, Snake of the Hundred Heads,
Lion of Burning Flame!
O God, Beast, Mystery, come! Thy mystic maids
Are hunted!—Blast their hunter with thy breath,
Cast o'er his head thy snare;
And laugh aloud and drag him to his death,
Who stalks thy herded madness in its lair!

(*Enter hastily a* MESSENGER *from the Mountain, pale and distraught*)

MESSENGER

Woe to the house once blest in Hellas! Woe
To thee, old King Sidonian, who didst sow
The dragon-seed on Ares' bloody lea!
Alas, even thy slaves must weep for thee!

LEADER

News from the mountain?—Speak! How hath it sped?

MESSENGER

Pentheus, my king, Echion's son, is dead!

LEADER

All hail, God of the Voice,
Manifest ever more!

MESSENGER

What say'st thou?—And how strange thy tone, as though
In joy at this my master's overthrow!

LEADER

With fierce joy I rejoice,
Child of a savage shore:
For the chains of my prison are broken, and the dread where I cowered of yore!

MESSENGER

And deem'st thou Thebes so beggared,[7] so forlorn
Of manhood, as to sit beneath thy scorn?

LEADER

Thebes hath o'er me no sway!
None save Him I obey,
Dionysus, Child of the Highest, Him I obey and adore!

MESSENGER

One can forgive thee!—Yet 'tis no fair thing,
Maids, to rejoice in a man's suffering.

LEADER

Speak of the mountain side!
Tell us the doom he died,
The sinner smitten to death, even where sin was sore!

MESSENGER

We climbed beyond the utmost habitings
Of Theban shepherds, passed Asopus' springs,
And struck into the land of rock on dim
Cithaeron—Pentheus, and, attending him,
I, and the Stranger who should guide our way.
Then first in a green dell we stopped, and lay,
Lips dumb and feet unmoving, warily
Watching, to be unseen and yet to see.
A narrow glen it was, by crags o'ertowered,
Torn through by tossing waters, and there lowered
A shadow of great pines over it. And there
The Maenad maidens sate; in toil they were,
Busily glad. Some with an ivy chain
Tricked a worn wand to toss its locks again;
Some, wild in joyance, like young steeds set free,
Made answering songs of mystic melody.
But my poor master saw not the great band
Before him. "Stranger," cried he, "where we stand
Mine eyes can reach not these false saints of thine.
Mount we the bank, or some high-shouldered pine,
And I shall see their follies clear!" At that
There came a marvel. For the Stranger straight
Touched a great pine-tree's high and heavenward crown,
And lower, lower, lower, urged it down
To the herbless floor. Round like a bending bow,
Or slow wheel's rim a joiner forces to,
So in those hands that tough and mountain stem
Bowed slow—oh, strength not mortal dwelt in them'—
To the very earth. And there he sat the King,

And slowly, lest it cast him in its spring,
Let back the young and straining tree, till high
It towered again amid the towering sky;
And Pentheus in the branches! Well, I ween,
He saw the Maenads then, and well was seen!
For scarce was he aloft, when suddenly
There was no Stranger any more with me,
But out of Heaven a Voice—oh, what voice else?—
'Twas He that called! "Behold, O damosels,
I bring ye him who turneth to despite
Both me and ye, and darkeneth my great Light.
'Tis yours to avenge!" So spake he, and there came
'Twixt earth and sky a pillar of high flame.
And silence took the air, and no leaf stirred
In all the forest dell. Thou hadst not heard
In that vast silence any wild thing's cry.
And up they sprang; but with bewildered eye,
Agaze and listening, scarce yet hearing true.
Then came the Voice again. And when they knew
Their God's clear call, old Cadmus' royal brood,
Up, like wild pigeons startled in a wood,
On flying feet they came, his mother blind,
Agave, and her sisters, and behind
All the wild crowd, more deeply maddened then,
Through the angry rocks and torrent-tossing glen,
Until they spied him in the dark pine-tree:
Then climbed a crag hard by and furiously
Some sought to stone him, some their wands would fling
Lance-wise aloft, in cruel targeting.
But none could strike. The height o'ertopped their rage,
And there he clung, unscathed, as in a cage
Caught. And of all their strife no end was found.
Then, "Hither," cried Agave; "stand we round
And grip the stem, my Wild Ones, till we take
This climbing cat-o'-the-mount! He shall not make
A tale of God's high dances!" Out then shone
Arm upon arm, past count, and closed upon
The pine, and gripped; and the ground gave, and down
It reeled. And that high sitter from the crown
Of the green pine-top, with a shrieking cry
Fell, as his mind grew clear, and there hard by
Was horror visible. 'Twas his mother stood
O'er him, first priestess of those rites of blood.

He tore the coif, and from his head away
Flung it, that she might know him, and not slay
To her own misery. He touched the wild
Cheek, crying: "Mother, it is I, thy child,
Thy Pentheus, born thee in Echion's hall!
Have mercy, Mother! Let it not befall
Through sin of mine, that thou shouldst slay thy son!"
But she, with lips a-foam and eyes that run
Like leaping fire, with thoughts that ne'er should be
On earth, possessed by Bacchios utterly,
Stays not nor hears. Round his left arm she put
Both hands, set hard against his side her foot,
Drew . . . and the shoulder severed!—Not by might
Of arm, but easily, as the God made light
Her hand's essay. And at the other side
Was Ino rending; and the torn flesh cried,
And on Autonoe pressed, and all the crowd
Of ravening arms. Yea, all the air was loud
With groans that faded into sobbing breath,
Dim shrieks, and joy, and triumph-cries of death.
And here was borne a severed arm, and there
A hunter's booted foot; white bones lay bare
With rending; and swift hands ensanguinèd
Tossed as in sport the flesh of Pentheus dead.
His body lies afar. The precipice
Hath part, and parts in many an interstice
Lurk of the tangled woodland—no light quest
To find. And, ah, the head! Of all the rest,
His mother hath it, pierced upon a wand,
As one might pierce a lion's, and through the land,
Leaving her sisters in their dancing place,
Bears it on high! Yea, to these walls her face
Was set, exulting in her deed of blood,
Calling upon her Bromios, her God,
Her Comrade, Fellow-Render of the Prey,
Her All-Victorious, to whom this day
She bears in triumph . . . her own broken heart!
For me, after that sight, I will depart
Before Agave comes.—Oh, to fulfil
God's laws, and have no thought beyond His will,
Is man's best treasure. Aye, and wisdom true,
Methinks, for things of dust to cleave unto!

(*The* MESSENGER *departs into the Castle.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Some Maidens

Weave ye the dance, and call
Praise to God!
Bless ye the Tyrant's fall!
Down is trod
Pentheus, the Dragon's Seed!
Wore he the woman's weed?
Clasped he his death indeed,
Clasped the rod?

A Bacchanal

Yea, the wild ivy lapt him, and the doomed
Wild Bull of Sacrifice before him loomed!

Others

Ye who did Bromios scorn,
Praise Him the more,
Bacchanals, Cadmus-born;
Praise with sore
Agony, yea, with tears!
Great are the gifts he bears!
Hands that a mother rears
Red with gore!

LEADER

But stay, Agave cometh! And her eyes
Make fire around her, reeling! Ho, the prize
Cometh! All hail, O Rout of Dionyse!
(*Enter from the Mountain* AGAVE, *mad, and to all seeming wondrously happy, bearing the head of* PENTHEUS *in her hand. The* CHORUS MAIDENS *stand horror-struck at the sight; the* LEADER, *also horror-struck, strives to accept it and rejoice in it as the God's deed.*)

AGAVE

Ye from the lands of Morn!

LEADER

Call me not; I give praise!

AGAVE

Lo, from the trunk new-shorn
Hither a Mountain Thorn

Bear we! O Asia-born
Bacchanals, bless this chase!

LEADER

I see. Yea; I see.
Have I not welcomed thee?

AGAVE

(*very calmly and peacefully*)
He was young in the wildwood:
Without nets I caught him!
Nay; look without fear on
The Lion; I have ta'en him!

LEADER

Where in the wildwood?
Whence have ye brought him?

AGAVE

Cithaeron. . . .

LEADER

Cithaeron?

AGAVE

The Mountain hath slain him!

LEADER

Who first came nigh him?

AGAVE

I, I, 'tis confessèd!
And they named me there by him
Agavè the Blessèd!

LEADER

Who was next in the band on him?

AGAVE

The daughters. . . .

LEADER

The daughters?

AGAVE

Of Cadmus laid hand on him.
But the swift hand that slaughters

Is mine; mine is the praise!
Bless ye this day of days!
(*The* LEADER *tries to speak, but is not able;* AGAVE *begins gently stroking the head.*)

AGAVE
Gather ye now to the feast!

LEADER
Feast!—O miserable!

AGAVE
See, it falls to his breast,
Curling and gently tressed,
The hair of the Wild Bull's crest—
The young steer of the fell!

LEADER
Most like a beast of the wild
That head, those locks defiled.

AGAVE
(*lifting up the head, more excitedly*)
He wakened his Mad Ones,
A Chase-God, a wise God!
He sprang them to seize this!
He preys where his band preys.

LEADER (*brooding, with horror*)
In the trail of thy Mad Ones
Thou tearest thy prize, God!

AGAVE
Dost praise it?

LEADER
I praise this?

AGAVE
Ah, soon shall the land praise!

LEADER
And Pentheus, O Mother,
Thy child?

AGAVE

He shall cry on
My name as none other,
Bless the spoils of the Lion!

LEADER

Aye, strange is thy treasure!

AGAVE

And strange was the taking!

LEADER

Thou art glad?

AGAVE

Beyond measure;
Yea, glad in the breaking
Of dawn upon all this land,
By the prize, the prize of my hand!

LEADER

Show then to all the land, unhappy one,
The trophy of this deed that thou hast done!

AGAVE

Ho, all ye men that round the citadel
And shining towers of ancient Thebe dwell,
Come! Look upon this prize, this lion's spoil,
That we have taken—yea, with our own toil,
We, Cadmus' daughters! Not with leathern-set
Thessalian javelins, not with hunter's net,
Only white arms and swift hands' bladed fall.
Why make ye much ado, and boast withal
Your armourers' engines? See, these palms were bare
That caught the angry beast, and held, and tare
The limbs of him! . . . Father! . . . Go, bring to me
My father! . . . Aye, and Pentheus, where is he,
My son? He shall set up a ladder-stair
Against this house, and in the triglyphs there
Nail me this lion's head, that gloriously
I bring ye, having slain him—I, even I!

(*She goes through the crowd towards the Castle, showing the head and looking for a place to hang it. Enter from the Mountain* CADMUS, *with attendants, bearing the body of* PENTHEUS *on a bier.*)

CADMUS

On, with your awful burden. Follow me,
Thralls, to his house, whose body grievously
With many a weary search at last in dim
Cithaeron's glens I found, torn limb from limb,
And through the interweaving forest weed
Scattered.—Men told me of my daughter's deed,
When I was just returned within these walls,
With grey Teiresias, from the Bacchanals.
And back I hied me to the hills again
To seek my murdered son. There saw I plain
Actaeon's mother, ranging where he died,
Autonoe; and Ino by her side,
Wandering ghastly in the pine-copses.
Agave was not there. The rumour is
She cometh fleet-foot hither.—Ah! 'Tis true;
A sight I scarce can bend mine eyes unto.

AGAVE

(*turning from the Palace and seeing him*)

My father, a great boast is thine this hour.
Thou hast begotten daughters, high in power
And valiant above all mankind—yea, all
Valiant, though none like me! I have let fall
The shuttle by the loom, and raised my hand
For higher things, to slay from out thy land
Wild beasts! See, in mine arms I bear the prize,
That nailed above these portals it may rise
To show what things thy daughters did! Do thou
Take it, and call a feast. Proud art thou now
And highly favoured in our valiancy!

CADMUS

O depth of grief, how can I fathom thee
Or look upon thee!—Poor, poor, bloodstained hand!
Poor sisters!—A fair sacrifice to stand
Before God's altars, daughter; yea, and call
Me and my citizens to feast withal!
Nay, let me weep—for thine affliction most,
Then for mine own. All, all of us are lost,
Not wrongfully, yet is it hard, from one
Who might have loved—our Bromios, our own!

AGAVE

How crabbèd and how scowling in the eyes
Is man's old age!—Would that my son likewise
Were happy of his hunting, in my way,
When with his warrior bands he will essay
The wild beast!—Nay, his violence is to fight
With God's will! Father, thou shouldst set him right. . . .
Will no one bring him hither, that mine eyes
May look on his, and show him this my prize!

CADMUS

Alas, if ever ye can know again
The truth of what ye did, what pain of pain
That truth shall bring! Or were it best to wait
Darkened for evermore, and deem your state
Not misery, though ye know no happiness?

AGAVE

What seest thou here to chide, or not to bless?

CADMUS

(*after hesitation, resolving himself*)
Raise me thine eyes to yon blue dome of air!

AGAVE

'Tis done. What dost thou bid me seek for there?

CADMUS

Is it the same, or changèd in thy sight?

AGAVE

More shining than before, more heavenly bright!

CADMUS

And that wild tremor, is it with thee still?

AGAVE (*troubled*)

I know not what thou sayest; but my will
Clears, and some change cometh, I know not how.

CADMUS

Canst hearken then, being changed, and answer, now?

AGAVE

I have forgotten something; else I could.

CADMUS
What husband led thee of old from mine abode?

AGAVE
Echion, whom men named the Child of Earth.

CADMUS
And what child in Echion's house had birth?

AGAVE
Pentheus, of my love and his father's bred.

CADMUS
Thou bearest in thine arms an head—what head?

AGAVE
(*beginning to tremble, and not looking at what she carries*)
A lion's—so they all said in the chase.

CADMUS
Turn to it now—'tis no long toil—and gaze.

AGAVE
Ah! But what is it? What am I carrying here?

CADMUS
Look once upon it full. till all be clear!

AGAVE
I see . . . most deadly pain! Oh, woe is me!

CADMUS
Wears it the likeness of a lion to thee?

AGAVE
No; 'tis the head—O God!—of Pentheus, this!

CADMUS
Blood-drenched ere thou wouldst know him! Aye, 'tis his.

AGAVE
Who slew him?—How came I to hold this thing?

CADMUS
O cruel Truth, is this thine home-coming?

AGAVE
Answer! My heart is hanging on thy breath!

CADMUS
'Twas thou.—Thou and thy sisters wrought his death.

AGAVE
In what place was it? His own house, or where?

CADMUS
Where the dogs tore Actaeon, even there.

AGAVE
Why went he to Cithaeron? What sought he?

CADMUS
To mock the God and thine own ecstasy.

AGAVE
But how should we be on the hills this day?

CADMUS
Being mad! A spirit drove all the land that way.

AGAVE
'Tis Dionyse hath done it! Now I see.

CADMUS (*earnestly*)
Ye wronged Him! Ye denied his deity!

AGAVE (*turning from him*)
Show me the body of the son I love!

CADMUS (*leading her to the bier*)
'Tis here, my child. Hard was the quest thereof.

AGAVE
Laid in due state?
(*As there is no answer, she lifts the veil of the bier, and sees.*)
Oh, if I wrought a sin,
'Twas mine! What portion had my child therein?

CADMUS
He made him like to you, adoring not
The God; who therefore to one bane hath brought
You and his body, wrecking all our line,
And me. Aye, no man-child was ever mine;
And now this first-fruit of the flesh of thee,
Sad woman, foully here and frightfully
Lies murdered! Whom the house looked up unto,
(*kneeling by the body*)

O Child, my daughter's child! who heldest true
My castle walls; and to the folk a name
Of fear thou wast; and no man sought to shame
My grey beard, when they knew that thou wast there,
Else had they swift reward!—And now I fare
Forth in dishonour, outcast, I, the great
Cadmus, who sowed the seed-rows of this state
Of Thebes, and reaped the harvest wonderful.
O my belovèd, though thy heart is dull
In death, O still belovèd, and alway
Belovèd! Never more, then, shalt thou lay
Thine hand to this white beard, and speak to me
Thy "Mother's Father"; ask "Who wrongeth thee?
Who stints thine honour, or with malice stirs
Thine heart? Speak, and I smite thine injurers!"
But now—woe, woe, to me and thee also,
Woe to thy mother and her sisters, woe
Alway! Oh, whoso walketh not in dread
Of Gods, let him but look on this man dead!

LEADER

Lo, I weep with thee. 'Twas but due reward
God sent on Pentheus; but for thee . . . 'Tis hard.

AGAVE

My father, thou canst see the change in me,

* * * * *
* * * * *

[*A page or more has here been torn out of the MS. from which all our copies of "The Bacchae" are derived. It evidently contained a speech of Agave (followed presumably by some words of the* CHORUS), *and an appearance of* DIONYSUS *upon a cloud. He must have pronounced judgment upon the Thebans in general, and especially upon the daughters of* CADMUS, *have justified his own action, and declared his determination to establish his godhead Where the MS. begins again, we find him addressing* CADMUS.]

* * * * *

DIONYSUS

* * * * *
* * * * *

And tell of Time, what gifts for thee he bears,
What griefs and wonders in the winding years.
For thou must change and be a Serpent Thing

Strange, and beside thee she whom thou didst bring
Of old to be thy bride from Heaven afar,
Harmonia, daughter of the Lord of War.
Yea, and a chariot of kine—so spake
The word of Zeus—thee and thy Queen shall take
Through many lands, Lord of a wild array
Of orient spears. And many towns shall they
Destroy beneath thee, that vast horde, until
They touch Apollo's dwelling, and fulfil
Their doom, back driven on stormy ways and steep.
Thee only and thy spouse shall Ares keep,
And save alive to the Islands of the Blest.
Thus speaketh Dionysus, Son confessed
Of no man but of Zeus!—Ah, had ye seen
Truth in the hour ye would not, all had been
Well with ye, and the Child of God your friend!

AGAVE

Dionysus, we beseech thee! We have sinned!

DIONYSUS

Too late! When there was time, ye knew me not!

AGAVE

We have confessed. Yet is thine hand too hot.

DIONYSUS

Ye mocked me, being God; this is your wage.

AGAVE

Should God be like a proud man in his rage?

DIONYSUS

'Tis as my sire, Zeus, willed it long ago.

AGAVE

(*turning from him almost with disdain*)
Old Man, the word is spoken; we must go.

DIONYSUS

And seeing ye must, what is it that ye wait?

CADMUS

Child, we are come into a deadly strait,
All; thou, poor sufferer, and thy sisters twain,
And my sad self. Far off to barbarous men,

A grey-haired wanderer, I must take my road.
And then the oracle, the doom of God,
That I must lead a raging horde far-flown
To prey on Hellas; lead my spouse, mine own
Harmonia, Ares' child, discorporate
And haunting forms, dragon and dragon-mate,
Against the tombs and altar-stones of Greece,
Lance upon lance behind us; and not cease
From toils, like other men, nor dream, nor past
The foam of Acheron find my peace at last.

AGAVE

Father! And I must wander far from thee!

CADMUS

O Child, why wilt thou reach thine arms to me,
As yearns the milk-white swan, when old swans die?

AGAVE

Where shall I turn me else? No home have I.

CADMUS

I know not; I can help thee not.

AGAVE

Farewell, O home, O ancient tower!
Lo, I am outcast from my bower,
And leave ye for a worser lot.

CADMUS

Go forth, go forth to misery,
The way Actaeon's father went!

AGAVE

Father, for thee my tears are spent.

CADMUS

Nay, Child, 'tis I must weep for thee;
For thee and for thy sisters twain!

AGAVE

On all this house, in bitter wise,
Our Lord and Master, Dionyse,
Hath poured the utter dregs of pain!

DIONYSUS

In bitter wise, for bitter was the shame
Yet did me, when Thebes honoured not my name.

AGAVE

Then lead me where my sisters be;
Together let our tears be shed,
Our ways be wandered; where no red
Cithaeron waits to gaze on me;
Nor I gaze back; no thyrsus stem,
Nor song, nor memory in the air.
Oh, other Bacchanals be there,
Not I, not I, to dream of them!

(AGAVE *with her group of attendants goes out on the side away from the Mountain.* DIONYSUS *rises upon the Cloud and disappears.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

There be many shapes of mystery.
And many things God makes to be,
Past hope or fear.
And the end men looked for cometh not,
And a path is there where no man thought.
So hath it fallen here.[9]

(*Exeunt*)

1. *i.e.,* belonging to Zeus.

2. Murray's note here runs: "Cadmus, by divine guidance, slew a dragon and sowed the teeth of it like seed in the 'Field of Ares.' From the teeth rose a harvest of Earth-born, or 'Giant' warriors, of whom Echion was one."

3. *i.e.,* the ether out of which phantoms or apparitions were made.

4. *i.e.,* the name, Pentheus, suggests *penthos,* sorrow or mourning.

5. Murray, in a note to this passage, remarks that the following scene in longer metre seems to him to be somewhat unlike Euripides in style, and also inferior. He adds that it may mark one of the unfinished parts of the play.

6. Murray's note here runs: "The refrain of this chorus about the fawn is difficult to interpret. I have practically interpolated the third line ('To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait'), in order (1) to show the connection of ideas; (2) to make clearer the meaning (as I understand it) of the two Orphic formulae, 'What is beautiful is beloved forever', and 'A hand uplifted over the head of Hate.' If I am wrong, the refrain is probably a mere cry for revenge, in the tone of the refrain, 'Hither for doom and deed,' on p. 266. It is one of the many passages where there is a sharp antagonism between the two spirits of the Chorus, first, as furious Bacchanals, and, secondly, as exponents of the idealized Bacchic religion of Euripides, which is so strongly expressed in the rest of this wonderful lyric."

7. Murray points out that this couplet is incomplete in the manuscript, but that the sense needed is obvious.

8. Murray remarks in his note to the passage that a prophecy like this is a very common occurrence in the last scene of Euripides' tragedies. He adds: "The prophecy was that Cadmus and Harmonia should be changed into serpents and should lead a host of barbarian invaders—identified with an Illyrian tribe, the Encheleis—against Hellas; they should prosper until they laid hands on the treasures of Delphi, and then be destroyed. Herodotus says that the Persians were influenced by this prophecy when they refrained from attacking Delphi (Book IX, 42)."

9. These lines are found likewise at the conclusion of the *Alcestis, Helen, Andromache,* and, with a slight addition, the *Medea.*

XVII
IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

Characters in the Play

Agamemnon, *Commander-in-Chief of the Greek Army*
Menelaus, *his brother*
Clytemnestra, *his queen*
Iphigenia, *his daughter*
Orestes, *his little son*
Achilles
An Old Servant
A Messenger
Chorus of Women from Chalcis
In the Epilogue, Another Messenger

INTRODUCTION

THE exact date of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* is not known, though scholars usually maintain that it was composed at the very end of Euripides' life, the period in which he wrote *The Bacchae*. We do know that the play remained unfinished at the poet's death, and that his son, the younger Euripides, completed it and subsequently produced it in 406 B.C. The spirit of the play is in sharp contrast to that of *The Bacchae*, and seems clearly to identify it closely with the dramatic creations of the fourth century B.C. The text as we now have it contains a number of passages which are apparently not genuine. For example, there seem to be two prologues, one a scene in dialogue, the other a conventional narrative passage, which have been worked together. The translator, F. M. Stawell, has relegated to an appendix all those lines and passages which she believes were not in the original version.

In his play Euripides has chosen to dramatize a crucial episode in the saga of the Trojan War. Prior to the opening of the action, Paris has taken away Helen, Menelaus has appealed to his powerful brother Agamemnon for assistance, and the latter has brought together the great Greek host at Aulis, where they are awaiting embarkation for Troy. However, the fleet have long been becalmed and the army has been growing increasingly restless and impatient of the delay. Agamemnon has just been told by Calchas that favourable winds will blow and the expedition will be able to sail if he sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia to Artemis. At first he refused, but then he yielded to the persuasions of Menelaus, the claims of his own ambition, and his fear of the army which he felt would deal violently with him if he abandoned his plan to go against Troy. Agamemnon therefore has written to his wife, Clytemnestra, telling her to bring Iphigenia to Aulis on the pretext that she is to be married to Achilles before the army departs. As the plays opens, Agamemnon's decision has weakened, and he has composed a letter to his wife, destined never to reach her, which bade the mother not to come with their daughter to the camp.

In the dramatic action which follows Euripides presents several excellent characterizations. Agamemnon is revealed as a weak-willed, ambi-

tious, yet by no means unkindly man, who is caught in a situation which is really too great for him to overcome. He is spiritually torn by the conflicting claims which press upon him, but does not possess enough strength to conquer his vanity and his lust for power. Achilles is not the great heroic figure of the *Iliad,* but a soldier who is eager to fight for the life of Iphigenia, and yet does not seem willing to do anything to stop her from giving up her life for her country, when once she has determined upon that course of action. Clytemnestra is first presented as a matron excited by the prospect of having her daughter married so successfully to the famous Achilles, but her real masterful and overpowering nature emerges after she learns the truth. Her plea to Agamemnon to spare their daughter's life begins by her furious declaration that she has always hated him and her speech continues relentlessly in a withering vituperation of her husband. Iphigenia is beautifully delineated. Her excitement at her coming wedding and her devotion to her father whom she so obviously loves deeply make her a most appealing figure. She takes on more reality when she shrinks in horror on realizing the fate in store for her, and finally she commands our whole-souled admiration when she regains her self-control, and decides to sacrifice herself in a spirit of true martyrdom to a greater cause. If we look at all these characterizations, we can immediately see that Euripides has taken conventional epic figures, brought them down from the epic level, and with great dexterity has "humanized" or personalized them to such an extent that the play as a whole becomes almost a social or domestic tragedy.

Three more points remain to be mentioned. Most noteworthy is Euripides' effective exploitation of dramatic irony in the scene immediately after Clytemnestra and Iphigenia have arrived at the camp. Every word of happiness uttered by the mother and daughter assails Agamemnon and the audience, who know the truth, with overwhelming force. Secondly, attention should be called to the fact that the Chorus has very little or nothing to do with the action of the play. Here Euripides is following his usual practice, from which he deviated most notably in *The Bacchae.* And finally, we should note the translator's treatment of the end of the play. In her opinion, Euripides concluded his piece with the departure of Iphigenia to the sacrificial altar. The epilogue, which records how the maiden was miraculously saved, hence is regarded as a later addition, written to make the play conform with the version of the legend upon which Euripides relied in the *Iphigenia in Tauris.*[1]

[1] Acknowledgment of indebtedness should be made to the introduction and appendices of the separate edition of Stawell's translation of the play, where several points mentioned above receive full and excellent treatment.

IPHIGENIA IN AULIS

(SCENE:—*The quarters of the Greek army at Aulis. Before the King's tent. Between midnight and dawn.* AGAMEMNON *enters from the tent.*)

AGAMEMNON

COME out, old man, out from the tent to me!

OLD SERVANT (*entering*)

Coming, my lord!
What new plan is afoot,
King Agamemnon?

AGAMEMNON

O, make haste, make haste!

OLD SERVANT

All that you will, my lord
I'm a light sleeper yet.

AGAMEMNON

What star is yonder, travelling in the sky?

OLD SERVANT

Sirius;
Close to the sevenfold voyaging Pleiades,
Still high overhead.

AGAMEMNON

No sound from the birds;
No sound from the sea.
The hush of the winds
Broods over Euripus.

OLD SERVANT

Why did you hasten out of the tent,
Lord Agamemnon?

No one is stirring in Aulis yet:
Nothing has roused
The guards on the ramparts.
Let us go in.

AGAMEMNON

O, you are fortunate,
Fortunate, all of you humble men,
Unknown, unhonoured, and free from fear!
Leaders may envy your lot.

OLD SERVANT

Ay, but glory is theirs.

AGAMEMNON

And in that glory lies their grief.
Suddenly, full in their pride of place
The wrath of the high gods shatters their life,
Or the quarrels of men
Mock them and thwart them.

OLD SERVANT

Are those the words of a chief? For shame!
You were not born for a life of ease,
Lord Agamemnon!
Joy and grief are a mortal's lot,
And the will of the high gods stronger than we.
But what has troubled you
All through the night? You kindled a torch,
Wrote on that tablet you hold in your hand,
Wrote and rewrote, sealed it, unsealed,
Dashed out the torch and burst into tears,
As though you were crazed.
Tell me, trust me, a faithful man,
Who came with your queen from her father's home,
One of the guard for the bride.†

AGAMEMNON

Here lie our men, all banded against Troy
To win back Helen for her rightful lord,
My brother Menelaus. I lead the host—
Doubtless they chose me for my brother's sake—
This glorious host of men and steeds and ships.

† Omitted Passage I, translated in the appendix, page 337, follows this speech

Would I had not been chosen! Here we lie,
Becalmed at Aulis, helpless! In our need
We asked the prophet Calchas, and he said
That I must sacrifice my own dear child,
Iphigenia, to soften Artemis,
The Goddess of this plain. Then, only then,
The fleet could sail, and we should conquer Troy.
When I heard that,
I told my herald to dismiss the host.—
I could not be my daughter's murderer.
But then my brother came and plied me hard,
And I, I yielded. A letter went from me
To the queen my wife, bidding her send our girl
To wed Achilles, for he was too proud,—
Or so I said,—to sail with me to Troy
Unless he had a child of ours to wife.
I thought this tale would work upon the queen
To send the girl. None knew of it but four,
Menelaus, Calchas, Odysseus, and myself.
But I have changed, I have repented me.
I wrote this other letter in the night,
The one you see here. Take it.—
Go with it straight to Argos. Stay. I'll read
What I have written. You're my faithful man.

OLD SERVANT

Do so: I'll speak the better to the queen.

AGAMEMNON

"Daughter of Leda, do not send our girl,
As I wrote first, unto this wide-winged gulf,
Where no waves dash on the deep-bosomed shore.
The marriage-feast
We must hold later."

OLD SERVANT

But, Achilles, sire,—
What of his anger if he lose his bride?
Will it not flame against you and your lady?

AGAMEMNON

O, that was dreadful too!

OLD SERVANT

What can you mean?

AGAMEMNON

I only used his name. He has not heard
Aught of our plans nor any word of marriage.†

OLD SERVANT

Ill done, O king, using him for a lure
To make your child the victim for the army.

AGAMEMNON

Alas, some madness seized me, I was lost!
But hasten now, old man! Forget your age!

OLD SERVANT

Trust me, my lord.

AGAMEMNON

Let nothing make you loiter:
No cool spring in the shade, no drowsiness.

OLD SERVANT

O, do not say such things!

AGAMEMNON

Scan all the crossways on your road, for fear
The chariot pass you bringing the maid to us.
And if you meet her, quick, turn back the steeds,
Drive with loose rein to Argos!

OLD SERVANT

So I will.

AGAMEMNON

Undo the barriers, go.

OLD SERVANT

What sign is there to show I come from you?

AGAMEMNON

The seal upon this tablet. Guard it! Quick!
The dawn is whitening in the sky, the sun's bright car
Will soon be here.—

(*The* OLD SERVANT *hurries out.*)

Woe's me for mortal men!
None have been happy yet.

(AGAMEMNON *goes into the tent. Enter the* CHORUS; *Greek women from Chalcis in the island opposite Aulis.*)

† Omitted Passage II follows here.

CHORUS (*singing*)

To the sands of the bay
Where the salt waves run
Over the narrows
We come, we come,
From Chalcis our harbour-town,—
Nurse of the Naiad
Whose waters neighbour the sea,
Arethusa of all renown,—
To gaze on our chivalry.

Ten thousand sail
Across the sea to Troy,—
Our husbands have told us the tale,—
They follow their far-famed, fair-haired kings
For the sake of that queen
Whom the Herdsman [1] beguiled
By the reedy Spartan springs,
Whom the Cyprian gave,
When Hera and Pallas and she
Met by the dews of the mountain-lake,
Met in their rivalry.

Up through the grove,—
The victim-place
That Artemis hallows,—
We sped apace;
Blushed at our boldness,
A new shy red in our cheeks
For all that we longed to see,
Aflame to see
Bulwark and buckler and cavalry,
Camp of our fighters,
Armed host of our horses and men.†

(*Enter* MENELAUS *and the* OLD SERVANT, *struggling together*)

OLD SERVANT

Shame on you, Menelaus! You have no right.

MENELAUS

Off! You are far too faithful to your lord.

† Omitted Passage III follows here.

OLD SERVANT

That sneer's my boast.

MENELAUS

You'll soon repent your zeal.

OLD SERVANT

You had no right to read the words I bore.

MENELAUS

Nor you to bear what would destroy the Greeks.

OLD SERVANT

Argue that out with others! Give me the letter.

MENELAUS

I will not.

OLD SERVANT

Then I will not let you go.

MENELAUS

You'll bleed for that! Your head shall feel my sceptre.

OLD SERVANT

Fair fame is his who dies to serve his lord.

MENELAUS

Let go! How the slave chatters!

OLD SERVANT

Master, help!
Help, Agamemnon! Thieves!—This man has stolen
The letter that you gave me.

(*Enter* AGAMEMNON)

AGAMEMNON

Ha! What's this?
What means this brawling at my very gate?

MENELAUS

Hear me! I am the one to speak, not he.

AGAMEMNON

Menelaus struggling with my man? How's this?

MENELAUS

First look me in the face and then I'll speak.

AGAMEMNON
You think I dare not? I, King Atreus' son?

MENELAUS
You see this tablet, you know its shameful words?

AGAMEMNON
It's mine. Give it to me

MENELAUS
No, not until
I show the army what you've written there.

AGAMEMNON
You broke the seal, then, read what was not yours?

MENELAUS
Yes, to lay bare your guilt.

AGAMEMNON
Have you no shame?
Where did you get it?

MENELAUS
On the road to Argos,
Watching to see if they would send your girl.

AGAMEMNON
And who set you to watch and spy on me?

MENELAUS
My own will set me. I'm no slave of yours.

AGAMEMNON
You dare? Can I not rule my house myself?

MENELAUS
No, for you change and veer with every wind.

AGAMEMNON
Well argued! But the wit of cruel men
Is hateful.

MENELAUS
And the purpose of weak men
Contemptible, and treacherous to boot.
O, you're the same man still! I'll show you that.
Hush, no more raging! I'll be fair enough.

Do you remember when your heart was set,
Though you concealed it, on this high command?
How suave you were, how friendly to each clown,
Doors open to the world, so affable,
Ready to talk with all, even when they would not!
And so you bought your power. But power won,
My lord was changed. He scarcely could be seen,
His old friends friends no more. Yet a true man
Will use his power most to help his friends.
So much for that. We sailed to Aulis then,
And lay becalmed, until the other lords
Bade you dismiss the fleet, nor linger here.
You came to me; you cried, "What can I do?
How keep the army, my command, my fame?"
Then Calchas bade you sacrifice your child
To Artemis, and she would send the wind.
And you were glad; you promised all he asked.
You wrote for her yourself,—you cannot say
Any man forced you,—bidding the queen your wife
Send her, to wed Achilles, so you feigned;
The eternal heavens hearkened to your words.
Now you betray us, writing fine new things;
You cannot be your daughter's murderer!
O, the trick's not uncommon! Many a chief
Endures at first, then fails; some through the fault
Of foolish citizens, but some because
They have not wit to keep their own land safe.
Alas for Hellas! I mourn most for her.
Equipped for glory, she must leave her foes,
Barbarians, to mock her,—through your girl and you.
Choose no man leader for his name, say I,
In peace or war. A general should have brains,
And it's the man of sense who rules the land.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Bitter are brothers when they fall to strife.

AGAMEMNON

Now I'll speak in my turn and show your faults
Frankly and plainly, yes, but soberly,
More like a brother. A good man should not rail.
Why are you fierce and your eyes full of blood?
How have I wronged you? What is it you want?

A lovely wife? I cannot help you there.
You could not rule the one you had. Must I
Suffer for you? Is my ambition blamed?
No, no, it's that fair woman you desire,
Careless of honour or of righteousness.
If I repent the evil thought I had,
Do you call me mad? Why, you are mad yourself,
Seeking a wicked wife, once rid of her.†
Enough! I will not slay my child to win
Unjust success for you, and for myself
Long nights and days of weeping bitter tears
For monstrous crime against my own dear children.
Do as you like; I will not do this deed.
There is my answer, short and clear enough.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, he has changed, repented! It is well.

MENELAUS

Woe's me! I have no friends.

AGAMEMNON

Not if you slay them.

MENELAUS

Are you my brother?

AGAMEMNON

In good deeds, not in vile.

MENELAUS

Brothers should share their griefs.

AGAMEMNON

Exhort me not
To death and ruin.

MENELAUS

Will you not help Greece?

AGAMEMNON

Some god has sent Greece mad and you with her.

MENELAUS

Guard your king's sceptre, traitor to your kin!
I'll turn to other means and other friends.

(*Enter* MESSENGER)

† Omitted Passage IV follows here.

MESSENGER

Leader of Hellas, Agamemnon, Lord!
I come to tell you I have brought your child,
Iphigenia, and her mother too,
The queen herself, your lady Clytemnestra,
And young Orestes, that you should have joy
Seeing them now, so far away from home.
Even while I speak they are resting by the stream
In a smooth, grassy meadow, taking food
While I come to prepare you. But already
The army knows they are here. Rumour runs quick.
And all the people throng to see your daughter,
For all men worship splendour. And they ask,
"Is it a marriage, or her father's love
That brings the maiden?" Or I hear some say,
"They mean to give the girl to Artemis,
Lady of Aulis." Who's to lead her here?
Tell me, prepare the rites, and crown yourselves,
You and lord Menelaus. The marriage-song,
The sound of flutes and dancing feet should fill
King's tent and camp.—
It is a day of glory for the girl.

AGAMEMNON

I thank you. Get you in. All shall go well
(*The* MESSENGER *goes into the tent*)
Woe, woe is me, unhappy, caught by fate,
Outwitted by the cunning of the gods!
O that I were base-born! Then I could weep.
What can I do, a king? Our dignity
Still rules our lives, and still we serve the mob.
I shame to weep, and yet I shame to weep not,
In this sore strait. What shall I tell my wife?
How can I greet her, look her in the face?
She has undone me, coming now, uncalled,
Coming to wed her daughter, full of love,
To find me thus, a murderer. And she,
Poor hapless maiden, now the bride of Death!
The pity of it! I hear her call to me,
"Father, O father, would you slay your child?
A bitter bridal have you made for me:
I would you had the like!" And he, the boy,
Little Orestes, he will cry with her,

Knowing and knowing not. Accursed Paris,
Thy rape of Helen hath destroyed me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I am a stranger to these lords, and yet
My heart is sick to feel the sorrow here.

MENELAUS

Brother, give me your hand.

AGAMEMNON

There.—You have won,
And I must suffer.

MENELAUS

No, it shall not be!
I swear by Pelops, grandsire of us both,
And by our father Atreus, I will speak
The very truth, out of my heart of hearts.
I saw you weep, I pitied you, and now
Unsay my words. I cannot torture you.
I cannot bid you slay your child for me.
Why should you mourn and I have joy thereby?
Your dear ones fall and mine have light and life?
There are more women if I lost this one.
Why should I slay my brother, my own flesh,
And take back Helen, an ill gift for a good?
I was mad, blinded, till I looked and saw
What this thing meant. Yes, and I pity her,
Poor maid, my brother's child, if she should die
To win my wife. What's Helen to your daughter?
Disband the army: send the host away.
Dry your eyes, brother; do not make me weep.
That prophecy you heard about your child,
I'll none of it: I leave it all to you.
My cruel thoughts have gone, and it is well
That love and pity for my own have changed me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Gallantly spoken! You do not shame your sires.

AGAMEMNON

I thank you, Menelaus, for this change,
Sudden and worthy of yourself.† But I,
I am compelled to that dread slaughter now.

† Omitted Passage V follows here

MENELAUS
How so? Who'll force you now to kill your child?

AGAMEMNON
The army: this great concourse of the Greeks.

MENELAUS
Not if you send her back again to Argos.

AGAMEMNON
That we could hide: there's more cannot be hid.

MENELAUS
And what? We should not shrink before the mob.

AGAMEMNON
Calchas will tell them all the prophecy.

MENELAUS
Not if we stop his mouth, and that's soon done.

AGAMEMNON
He's base, ambitious, like every prophet born.

MENELAUS
They do no good: they are never any use.

AGAMEMNON
But there's another danger, is there not?

MENELAUS
How can I say? What danger do you mean?

AGAMEMNON
The son of Sisyphus [2] knows everything.

MENELAUS
Odysseus? He's no match for you and me.

AGAMEMNON
He's full of cunning, and he rules the mob.

MENELAUS
Yes,—he's ambitious.—Curse on that curse of men!

AGAMEMNON
Can you not hear him, risen in his place,
Telling the army all that Calchas said

And how I promised I would give my child
And then drew back?—Thus he'll goad on the men
To kill us, and then sacrifice the girl.
Or if we fled to Argos they would follow,
Conquer the land, and lay the great walls low.
See how the gods have compassed us about
With suffering,—no escape now! O, my brother,
Do this one thing for me! Go to the army
And see that Clytemnestra shall not learn
What must be, till I give my child to Death.
Let my tears be enough. And you, my friends,
Strangers, yet friends too,—keep the secret safe.
(MENELAUS *goes to the camp,* AGAMEMNON *and the* OLD SERVANT *into the king's tent.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Thrice blest the calmer natures, the stronger hearts of passion,
Peace-possessed, though the god,
Gold-haired, twin-souled, should smite them.
Keen are his darts for rapture, and keen, keen for ruin!
O Cyprian, grant us rest,
Come not for our undoing!
But send us holy love,
Thou dearest, loveliest,
All madness far above.

The ways of man are many, and changeful all their fashion;
The true Good still shines fair,
And souls that are schooled
Shall still draw nigh to her.
Reverence shall sit in Wisdom's place,
Hers is the high, compelling grace
To find, thought-led, the right,
Whence glories flow,
Failing not in this life.
Seek virtue, for the search is great,
Where woman's hidden love may grow,
A splendour in the soul of man,
Strengthening thousand-fold the State.

The king's son [1] herded cattle,
A lad alone on Ida,
Playing tunes on his pipe, strange melodies,

Like the airs Olympus sang,
Suddenly called from sleek white herds at pasture
To judge the goddesses
And sent forthwith to Hellas.
Beneath pearl-carven portals
His eyes looked deep in Helen's,
A long and answered look.
Love he gave, love he took,
Paris, athrob and trembling. But from that joy rose war,
war that will not yield,
All Hellas sailing for Troy
With sword and spear and shield.
(*The royal car appears with* CLYTEMNESTRA, IPHIGENIA, ORESTES, *and their attendants.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

See, O see!
Iphigenia the young princess,
Clytemnestra the queen!
Great are the joys of the great,
Born from kings and for long renown!
Like gods in their splendour they seem
To us, weak mortals and poor.
Gather round, daughters of Chalcis,
Help the queen from her car
Courteously, gently! Disturb not the child
Nor startle the stranger princesses.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I thank you, women, for your kindly words,
Words of good omen, for I come, I hope,
To a good marriage, bringing the young bride.
Take out the dowries I have brought for her.
Carry them in, right carefully. And now,
My darling child, here we must leave the car.
Lift her down, maidens, take her in your arms;
She's a frail flower. Give me a hand too, some one,
The chariot-step is high. Carry the child,
Orestes: he's a babe. What, fast asleep
With all the driving? Wake up, little lad,
Wake for your sister's wedding! Chieftain's child,
Brother-in-law to Thetis' godlike son!
Put him here, Iphigenia, at my feet,

And stand beside me there yourself. The strangers
Will envy me for my rich motherhood.

(*Enter* AGAMEMNON)

CLYTEMNESTRA

There comes your father! Let us greet him, girl!
Most honoured lord, King Agamemnon, hail!
We come at your behest

IPHIGENIA

O mother, blame me not! Let me go first
And put my arms about my father's neck.†

CLYTEMNESTRA

Go, go, my girl. You always loved your father
More than the other children.

IPHIGENIA

Father, how glad it makes my heart to see you!
It is so long since you have been away!

AGAMEMNON

Yes, and mine too; your words are for us both!

IPHIGENIA

How good it was of you to send for me!

AGAMEMNON

No, child, not good; and yet there's good in it.

IPHIGENIA

Why, what is it? There's trouble in your face,
Your eyes are sad. You are not glad to see me!

AGAMEMNON

A general and a king has many cares.

IPHIGENIA

O, stay with me now; send your cares away!

AGAMEMNON

Why, all my cares are only for your sake.

IPHIGENIA

Then smooth your face, unknit your brows, and smile!

† Omitted Passage VI follows here

AGAMEMNON
I am as glad as I can be, my child.

IPHIGENIA
And all the while the tears are in your eyes!

AGAMEMNON
The parting that must come will be for long.

IPHIGENIA
O, father dear, I do not understand.

AGAMEMNON
Had you the sense I should but suffer more.

IPHIGENIA
Then I'll talk nonsense, if that pleases you.

AGAMEMNON
I cannot bear this. But I thank you, child.

IPHIGENIA
Stay with your children, father, stay at home.

AGAMEMNON
I would I could; I cannot have my will.

IPHIGENIA
Ruin take the army and my uncle's wrongs!

AGAMEMNON
They will ruin others. They have ruined me.

IPHIGENIA
How long you have been here in Aulis Bay!

AGAMEMNON
And something holds me still from setting out.

IPHIGENIA
Father, where is it that the Phrygians live?

AGAMEMNON
Where Paris never should have found a home.

IPHIGENIA
Will it be long till you return to me?

AGAMEMNON
As long for me as you, my darling child.

IPHIGENIA
If you could take me on the journey too!

AGAMEMNON
There is another journey you must take—
And you will not forget your father there.

IPHIGENIA
Shall I go with my mother, or alone?

AGAMEMNON
Alone, alone, severed from both of us.

IPHIGENIA
Father, it is not to another home?

AGAMEMNON
Hush, hush! A maiden must not know such things.

IPHIGENIA
Well, conquer Troy and come back soon to me.

AGAMEMNON
I have a sacrifice to offer first.

IPHIGENIA
We ask God's will, I know, in solemn rites.

AGAMEMNON
Yes. You will stand beside the bowl and learn.

IPHIGENIA
And lead the dances round the altar too?

AGAMEMNON
O, you are happy, for you do not know!
Go to the tent, my child. It is not fit
For maidens to be seen—
Give me the bitter sweetness of your kiss,
Give me your hand,—you will be long away.

O face, dear face, O breast, O golden hair!
A heavy burden has been laid on you
By Troy and Helen! I must speak no more,

I must not touch you: the tears fill my eyes.
Now go within.

(IPHIGENIA *goes into the tent.*)

Forgive me, O my queen,
If I seem too much moved, wedding our child
To young Achilles. 'Tis a goodly match,
But fathers feel it when they lose their girls.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I have my feelings too. I shall shed tears,
I know, like you. But all such things must be,
And time will help us. Tell me of the groom:
His name I know, but tell me of his race.

AGAMEMNON

Aegina was the daughter of Asopus.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Who was her husband? A mortal or a god?

AGAMEMNON

Zeus. Aeacus their child, Oenone's lord.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What son of Aeacus succeeded him?

AGAMEMNON

Peleus, and Peleus won the Nereid.

CLYTEMNESTRA

By the gods' grace, or in the gods' despite?

AGAMEMNON

Zeus gave her, Zeus, the best of guarantors.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Where was the bridal? Not in the ocean-surge?

AGAMEMNON

Where Cheiron dwelt among the solemn hills.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ah, where they say the Centaurs had their haunts?

AGAMEMNON

Ay, there the high gods held the marriage-feast.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Did Thetis rear Achilles or his sire?

AGAMEMNON
Neither of them. They sent him unto Cheiron
To train him up far from the sins of men.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Wise teacher, wiser parents.

AGAMEMNON
And a fine son-in-law.

CLYTEMNESTRA
He's not unworthy. Where has he his home?

AGAMEMNON
In Phthia, by the river.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Will you take her there?

AGAMEMNON
That we must leave to him.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Well, good go with them'—
When is the bridal?

AGAMEMNON
When the moon is full.

CLYTEMNESTRA
And have you slain the victim for the goddess?

AGAMEMNON
I shall do so: I must.

CLYTEMNESTRA
The marriage-feast,
You hold it later?

AGAMEMNON
When I have sacrificed
What the gods call for.

CLYTEMNESTRA
And we women, where
Hold we our banquet?

AGAMEMNON
There, beside the ships.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Among the ropes and anchors? Well, so be it.

AGAMEMNON
Listen to me, wife: bear with me in this.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Do I not do so always? What's your wish?

AGAMEMNON
To give the bride myself.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Without her mother?
And where will you send me?

AGAMEMNON
Why, home to Argos
To guard our unwed daughters.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Leaving her?
My eldest child? Who'll hold the marriage-torch?

AGAMEMNON
I will.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Unheard-of! You think naught of that?

AGAMEMNON
A naval camp is no fit place for you.

CLYTEMNESTRA
But fitting, and most fitting, I should be
At my own daughter's bridal.

AGAMEMNON
Nor should our girls
Be left alone at Argos.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, for that,
They are well cared for in their maiden-halls.

AGAMEMNON

Good wife, be counselled.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now, by Hera, husband,
Do your man's work and leave the home to me.†

(CLYTEMNESTRA *goes into the tent with her escort.*)

AGAMEMNON

All's vain! I cannot rid myself of her.
Ah! how I twist and turn, how fruitlessly,
Plotting against my dearest every way!
It is for Hellas. I go to Calchas now
And plan with him what best will please the goddess
Although it crush me. Ah, the prudent man
Will choose for wife a helpmeet, or choose none
(*He goes out towards the camp.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

They shall come to the streams
Silver-swift on Apollo's shores,
Our host of Greeks, our ships our warriors.
There the wild Cassandra
Will loose her laurelled hair,
Bright hair tossed wide on a wind of dreams,
And cry aloud when God
Cries to men through her.

Right well must Troy be manned
When our war, ocean-borne, full in flood
Sweeps their land.
Lords of the air are Helen's brothers,
Twins enskied,
But Greeks bring home the bride,
Home with shield and spear.

Towered Troy shall be ta'en
In a closed ring of blood,

† Omitted Passage VII follows here

Red whelming waters,
Her women wail for horror,
The queen and all her train
Of weeping daughters,
When our stroke smites their city,
Spares not, has no pity.

All Lydia's golden dames reproach the bride,
The bride of error,
Weaving their webs, lamenting, terrified: —
(O far from me or mine that terror!)
One to another they say,—
Whispering, shaken:—
"Which of the foemen will drag me away,
Making grim spoil of the long bright hair,
When our city is taken?"

Through thee, through thee, thou fair-faced child of the Swan!*
Of the Swan, if it be
That the tale is sooth,
Not only the idle song
Of a singer laughing at truth.

(*Enter* ACHILLES)

ACHILLES

Where is the captain of the hosts of Greece?
Tell him Achilles stands without the door,
The son of Peleus, asking speech of him.†
I have left my home Pharsalus and my sire
To linger here along Euripus' beach
And wait upon these winds that will not blow.
My Myrmidons grow restless: day by day
Their murmur swells: "More waiting! How much more
Before we launch upon our voyage for Troy?
Act, son of Peleus, if to act at all
Be your intent: else take us home, and leave
The sons of Atreus to their own delays."

(*Enter* CLYTEMNESTRA *from the tent*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

Son of the Nereid, we were in the tent
And heard your voice, and now come forth to greet you.

* Omitted Passage VIII follows here

ACHILLES

How's this? A woman? So stately and so fair!

CLYTEMNESTRA

You are amazed because you know us not,
Never have seen us yet.

ACHILLES

Who are you, lady?
How have you come, a woman, to the camp?

CLYTEMNESTRA

My name is Clytemnestra, Leda's daughter
And Agamemnon's wife.

ACHILLES

All thanks, great queen,
For your high courtesy. But I must go:
I should not talk with women.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Why should you go?
Stay here: give me your hand, and may the clasp
Be pledge of happy married days to come!

ACHILLES

I? Clasp your hand? Agamemnon would be wroth!
I have no right.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Surely the best of rights,
Wedding my daughter.

ACHILLES

Wedding your daughter? How?
Lady, I cannot speak. What dream is this?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I know it must be strange to meet new friends
Speaking of marriage on your wedding-eve.

ACHILLES

I was no suitor for your daughter, lady;
The sons of Atreus never spoke of her.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What can this mean? My words are strange to you,
But even so strange to me is all you say.

ACHILLES

We both must wonder: both have cause for wonder,
For surely both speak truth.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Am I deceived, then?
Have I been made to woo you for my daughter
Against your will? O, I am all abashed.

ACHILLES

Someone, it seems, has played upon us both.
But let it pass, and care not overmuch.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Farewell. I cannot look you in the face,
Thus put to shame and made to speak a lie.

ACHILLES

I am shamed too, O queen! But I will go
Into the tent and ask your husband all.
(*The* OLD SERVANT *appears at the tent-door.*)

OLD SERVANT

Wait, son of Aeacus! Wait, Leda's daughter!

ACHILLES

Who calls? Some frightened man, opening the door!

OLD SERVANT

A slave: I'll own that now.

ACHILLES

Whose? None of mine:
My men and Agamemnon's keep apart.

OLD SERVANT

I am the queen's: her sire gave me to her.

ACHILLES

Speak, we are waiting: tell us what you want.

OLD SERVANT

Are you alone? Is no one near the gates?

CLYTEMNESTRA
We are alone. Come out and speak with us.

OLD SERVANT
O luck and wits of mine! Save those I love!

ACHILLES
He'll not speak till to-morrow. He's afraid.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Surely you trust me? Tell me: have no fear.

OLD SERVANT
You know that I have served you faithfully.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Long years, I know, you have served my house and me.

OLD SERVANT
Agamemnon only got me with your dower.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Yes, yes.
You came with me to Argos on my marriage.

OLD SERVANT
So I am yours, and Agamemnon's less.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Come, come, your secret! Out with it at last!

OLD SERVANT
He means to kill your child, his child!

CLYTEMNESTRA
What? Are your wits turning, man?

OLD SERVANT
I say the steel
Is sharpening now for that white neck of hers.

CLYTEMNESTRA
What horror's here? Or is my husband mad?

OLD SERVANT
O, sane enough, except for you and her.

CLYTEMNESTRA
But what's his purpose? What devil drives him on?

OLD SERVANT
The prophet Calchas, that the fleet may sail.

CLYTEMNESTRA
And whither?—O, my child, my child!—

OLD SERVANT
To Troy,
So Menelaus get his wife again.

CLYTEMNESTRA
And so for Helen's sake my girl is doomed?

OLD SERVANT
Even as you say. He'll sacrifice the maid
To Artemis

CLYTEMNESTRA
Then it was all a lie,
That marriage?

OLD SERVANT
Yes; to lure you from your home.

CLYTEMNESTRA
O, we are lost, my child and I! Lost, lost!

OLD SERVANT
Most piteously, and Agamemnon damned.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Utterly lost! I cannot stop my tears.

OLD SERVANT
What mother could? Let your tears have their way.

CLYTEMNESTRA
You say it's true, old man,—how do you know?

OLD SERVANT
He sent me to you with another letter

CLYTEMNESTRA
Bidding us come, that he might murder her?

OLD SERVANT
No, stopping you. He had relented then.

CLYTEMNESTRA
But how was it you did not give it me?

OLD SERVANT
Menelaus seized it. He's the cause of all.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Son of the Nereid, do you hear these words?

ACHILLES
Dread words for you, and grim enough for me.

CLYTEMNESTRA
They used your name to lure my child to death.

ACHILLES
Ill done, by Heaven, ill done!

CLYTEMNESTRA
O goddess-born!
You see a wretched woman at your knees!
All pride has left me. What should I care for now
Except my daughter? Help me, Thetis' son!
Pity my need, and pity your poor bride,
Bride but in name, I know, yet none the less
I decked her for you, dreamt she would be yours,
Brought her to you,—and brought her to her death.
You will be shamed if you desert her now,
Poor hapless maid, not yours, and yet called yours!
Now by your right hand and your mother's soul
Your name destroyed us,—save it and save us!
This is my only altar, at your knees!
I have no friend here else: you heard yourself
Lord Agamemnon's cruelty—I stand
Alone, a helpless woman, as you see,
Among a crowd of sailors, lawless men,
Fierce men, if goaded, yet much good in them,
When they're so minded. If you champion me,
You save us: if you stand aside, we die.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
There speaks a mother's heart, the thrall of love:
She will dare all things for her children's sake.

ACHILLES

My blood's on fire. All tyrants I detest,
Though I yield gladly to a tempered rule.†
Noble old Cheiron taught me to love truth,
And I'll obey our chiefs when they lead well,
Not when they counsel crimes. Here and in Troy
I'll keep my spirit free, my sword unstained.
Lady, indeed you have been foully used,
Even at the hands where you should look for love;
And all the pity that a soldier can
I give you freely. Fear not for your child,
Mine she was called, and to the sacrifice
I will not yield her. I'll not play decoy
To lure the victim to the net of death.
My name it was, though I touched not the steel,
Mine which should slay your daughter. True, the cause
Is Agamemnon: yet I needs must bear
The stain of murder if she perish thus,
Betrayed and cheated through her trust in me,
Outraged, dishonoured. I must count myself
The meanest man in all the host of Greece,
Viler than Menelaus, child of hell,
Not son of Peleus, should I lend my name
To be the accomplice of your husband's deed.
Now by the sea-born founder of my line,
Nereus, the sire of Thetis, who gave me birth,
Never shall Agamemnon touch your child—
No, not the merest fringes of her robe.‡
The steel shall answer, red with clots of gore,
Long before Troy is reached, if any man
Should drag your daughter from me. Be at rest:
I seem a god to you and I am none,
Yet will I play this part you choose for me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Fit words, O son of Peleus, for yourself
And for your mother, the sea-pure Nereid!

CLYTEMNESTRA

I have no words—my words would seem too wild
And yet too poor where so great thanks are due.
A generous heart, I know, will turn from praise—

† Omitted Passage IX follows here.
‡ Omitted Passage X follows here.

How dare I praise you, sick with my own griefs
And you a stranger with no part in them?
Yet a true man will help a stranger's need.
O pity us, for pitiable we are!
I took you for my son, an empty hope,
Yes, and an evil omen for yourself
If she must die who once was called your bride,
My daughter. Never let that omen be!
But you have answered nobly, first and last,
And through your help my daughter will be saved.
Or should I bring her here to clasp your knees?
No maiden's part, yet if you will she'll come,
Her eyes still brave and free in her shy face.
But, would you grant us all without her coming,
I'd keep her back. I know the girl is proud,
Too proud,—though modesty becomes a maid.

ACHILLES

I would not have you bring her to me thus,
For we must shun the gossip of the crowd:
Scandal's the joy of an idle army.
Nor do I need more prayers to help you now;
It is my pride to save you and my joy.
And of one thing be sure: I keep my pledge.
If I play false and make but idle boast,
Death be my lot: but if I save her, life.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Heaven help you for your help in our distress!

ACHILLES

Now hear my plan, and all may yet be well.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Say what you wish: in all I will obey.

ACHILLES

Let us persuade your lord to better thoughts.

CLYTEMNESTRA

He is a coward, and he fears the army.

ACHILLES

Yet reasons good may conquer reasons bad.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Small hope of that! Yet say what I should do.

ACHILLES

Plead with the father for the daughter's life:
If he should still refuse you, turn to me.
But should he listen, good; I need not act.
You are safe without it. And I'd treat a friend
More fairly thus, nor could the army blame me
If I had won by reason, not by force,
While you yourself would have more peace at home
If all seemed done without me and done well.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Wise are your words. I will do all you say.
Yet if we not accomplish what we hope,
Where shall I find you, whither turn to reach
Your hand, your succour, in our desperate need?

ACHILLES

I will keep watch myself, and wait for you,
That none may see you hurrying through the host
Alone in all your grief, a great man's daughter.

CLYTEMNESTRA

So let it be! Surely one day the gods
Will bless you for your generous help to me,—
If gods there are: if not, what use our toil? [4]
(CLYTEMNESTRA *goes into the tent,* ACHILLES *towards the camp.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Who knows the marriage-song that once so proudly rang
To the flute and the pipe and the dancer's lyre,
The song the Muses sang?
Up Pelion's glades they danced,
The bright Pierian choir:
Their golden sandals glanced,
Their tresses gleamed as they made their way,
Chanting the names, the names of bride and bridegroom,
Through woods where Centaurs lay
To the god-given feast
For Thetis and her lover.
Page Ganymede, the Phrygian boy,
Darling of Zeus, his luxury's toy,
Poured wine in golden beakers.

Far down on white-lit sand
Beside Aegaean waters
Danced, circling hand-in-hand,
The Nereid maids,
The Sea-king's fifty daughters.

With green grass crowned and pine
Did the revelling Centaurs race
To the bowl of the Bacchanal wine,
Their horse-hoofs thudding apace,
And one, the prophet, Apollo's friend,
Cheiron, shouted and sang of what should be in the end.—
"Hearken, child of the sea!
Thou shalt bear a son, a son to be
Light and glory for Thessaly.
Shield and spear shall he send to destroy
The land of Priam, sack
The far-famed town of Troy,
Gold-helmed, gold harness on his back,
Harness a god had wrought,
Harness his mother brought."
High rose that revelry
When gods made cheer for bride and groom,
For Peleus and the Nereid,
The first-born of the sea.

Ah, but thou! Thou shalt be crowned for thy doom,
Thy fair hair garlanded,
Like a dappled heifer ensnared
On lone hills in a cavern's gloom.
Blood will the Argives draw from thy throat,
Though no pipe drew thee, no herdsman's cord;
Nay, but thy mother to be the bride
Of a Grecian lord.

Honour hath vanished and faithfulness fled,
Their faces faint as the face of the dead.
Sin grows strong, crime bears rule,
Lost is the loyal endeavour, the school
Of holy dread.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *hurries out from the tent*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

Where is my lord? I come to look for him.
He has been long away, and my poor child
Is all in tears, learning the cruel death
Her father means for her. Ah, there he comes,
His children's murderer!—as I shall prove.
(*Enter* AGAMEMNON *from the camp*)

AGAMEMNON

Well met, my wife, alone! I have things to say
Not fit for brides to hear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And what is it
For which you seize the chance?

AGAMEMNON

Send out the girl
Here to her father. All is ready now,
The lustral water, the flour, the cleansing fire,
The heifers that must fall to please the goddess
Before the marriage.†

CLYTEMNESTRA

Truly, your words are fair;
Your deeds, how shall I name them?
(*She goes to the tent-door.*)
Come, my girl;
You know your father's will. Come, bring with you
The child, Orestes.
(IPHIGENIA *and* ORESTES *come from the tent.*)
Here is your daughter, sire,
At your command. Now will I speak for her.

AGAMEMNON

Why do you weep, my girl? No smile for me?
Your eyes fixed on the ground? Your sweet face hid?

CLYTEMNESTRA

O, which of all my wrongs shall I take first?
For first and last and midmost, all are first.

AGAMEMNON

What is it? What has happened to you all?
Sad, drooping faces, trouble-darkened eyes?

† Omitted Passage XI follows here

CLYTEMNESTRA

Speak truth, my husband, in what I ask you now.

AGAMEMNON

No need to bid me: ask me what you will.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Your daughter, yours and mine, you mean to kill her?

AGAMEMNON

Hold!
You dare ask that? There's something you suspect?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Rage not, my lord:
Answer my question.

AGAMEMNON

Such questions are not fit.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I have no others.

AGAMEMNON

O, my wretched fate!

CLYTEMNESTRA

And mine and hers, all three thrice miserable.

AGAMEMNON

Whom have I injured?

CLYTEMNESTRA

You ask that of me? †

AGAMEMNON

Betrayed, betrayed! My secret has been sold.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I know, I have learnt, all that you mean to do.
Your silence and your groanings,—they confess,
They speak for you. O, weary not yourself!

AGAMEMNON

See, I am silent: I'll not add lies to grief.

† Omitted Passage XII follows here.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then hear me now. I'll speak the naked truth,
No dark hints now! By force you wedded me,
I never loved you! Tantalus you slew,
My first dear husband; and my little son,
You tore him from my breast. And when my brothers,
The sons of God, flashed to me on their steeds,
My father pitied you, his suppliant,
Gave me to you for wife. And a true wife I was,
Yes, chaste and true, and cared well for your home.
Such wives are not so common!—
Three girls I bore you and a son, and now
You rob me of the first! Your reason, pray,
If men should ask it? O, I'll answer that,—
To win back Helen! Your own child for a wanton,
Your dearest for a foe! A proper bargain!
If you do this, if you are long at Troy,
What will my heart be like, think you, at home,
When I look on my daughter's empty chair,
And empty room, sitting there all alone,
Companied by my tears, still muttering,
"Your father killed you, child, killed you himself!"
What will your wages be when you come back?
We who are left, we shall not want much urging
To greet you with the welcome you deserve! [5]
O, by the gods, drive me not thus to sin,
Nor sin yourself!
If once you killed your child, how could you pray?
What good thing ask for? Rather for defeat,
Disgrace, and exile! Nor could I pray for you:
We make fools of the gods if we suppose
They can love murderers. If you come home,
Will you dare kiss your girls? Or they dare come,
That you may choose another for the knife?
Have you once thought of this? Are you a man?
Or nothing but a sceptre and a sword?
You should have gone among the Greeks and said,
"You wish to sail for Troy? Good, then draw lots,
And see whose child must die." That had been fair;
Or Menelaus should have slain his own,—
Hermione for Helen. But I, the chaste,
I must be robbed, and she come home in triumph
To find her daughter! Answer, if I am wrong!
If not, give up this murder! Sin no more!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O listen, listen! Help to save your child!
Yield, Agamemnon! Not a man will blame you.

IPHIGENIA

Had I the voice of Orpheus, O my father,
If I could sing so that the rocks would move,
If I had words to win the hearts of all,
I would have used them. I have only tears.
See, I have brought them! They are all my power.
I clasp your knees, I am your suppliant now,
I, your own child; my mother bore me to you.
O, kill me not untimely! The sun is sweet!
Why will you send me into the dark grave?
I was the first to sit upon your knee,
The first to call you father, first to give
Dear gifts and take them. And you used to say,
"My darling, shall I see you safely wed,
In some good husband's home, a happy wife,
As I would have you?" Then I'd answer you,
Stroking your beard, the beard that I touch now,
"What shall I do for you, O father mine?
Welcome you, a loved guest, in my own house,
Pay you for all your nursing-care of me?
Oh, I remember every word we said,
But you forget them, and you wish my death.
Have pity, for your father Atreus' sake
And for my mother's; she has suffered once
When I was born, and she must suffer now.
What can I have to do with Helen's love?
How is it she has come to ruin me?
My father, look at me, and kiss me once,
That I may take this memory at least
Unto the grave with me, if I must die.
(*She turns to the child* ORESTES.)
O, brother, you are young to help your friends,
Yet come and cry with me, kneel down and pray
For you poor sister's life. O father, see!
Even children understand when sorrow comes!
He asks for mercy though he cannot speak;
Yes, we two children touch your beard and pray,
We, your grown daughter and your little son.
Now will I gather all prayers into one,

And that must conquer. Life is sweet, is sweet!
The dead have nothing. Those who wish to die
Are out of reason. Life, the worst of lives,
Is better than the proudest death can be!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Accursed Helen! Through your love and you
Torture has come upon this royal house!

AGAMEMNON

I know the touch of pity, know it well:
I love my children,—I am no madman, wife.
It is a fearful thing to do this deed,
Yet fearful not to do it: I am bound.
(*He turns to* IPHIGENIA.)
You see this host of ships and mail-clad men,—
They cannot reach the towers of Ilium,
They cannot take the far-famed steep of Troy,
Unless I sacrifice you as he bids,
Calchas, the prophet. And our Greeks are hot
To smite the foe, nor let them steal our wives.
If I refuse the Goddess, they will come
To Argos, kill your sisters, you and me!
I am no slave of Menelaus, child;
I do not bow to him, I bow to Hellas,
As bow I must, whether I will or no.
She is the greater. For her we live, my child,
To guard her freedom. Foreigners must not rule
Our land, nor tear our women from their homes.
(*He goes out to the camp.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

O, my child! O, my friends!
You must die! You must die!
Your father has fled,
He has flung you to death!

IPHIGENIA

Mother, mother! O, mourn with me!
The daylight has died,
I have lost the light of the sun!
(*She flings herself in her mother's arms.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Far snow-bound glens of Phrygia's lonely mountains,
Where Priam's babe was left, left by his father,
Cast out to die, hapless unmothered boy,
Paris the shepherd-lad, born prince of Troy!

Would he had died there, left lone by his father,
Lone by the lake-side, the nymph-haunted fountains,
Meadows of hyacinth, starry with roses
The goddesses gather!

Pallas came, Hera came, came Beauty's queen,—
Hermes the messenger led,—
Pallas, proud of her lance,
Hera, vaunting the royal bed,
Beauty, guile-hearted, waked love with her glance.
Ah, the prize, fraught with hate,
For Beauty's lovely head!

IPHIGENIA

Fraught with my fate, for the glory of Greece.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Artemis orders your sacrifice,
Maiden, for Ilium.

IPHIGENIA (*chanting*)

Mother, my father has gone,
Left me, betrayed and alone!
I have seen Helen, her face was death.
And I am hunted to my doom,
A cruel doom, by a cruel father.

O that they never had come,
The bronze-beaked, pine-oared ships,
To the shores of Aulis Bay!
O that God had not sent
Contrary winds on the sea,
Gentle breezes for some,
Sailing and harbour for some,
Sorrow and doom for us!
Yes, we are children of sorrow, of sorrow, who live for the space of a day:
Trouble must rise up afresh for the race of man evermore

Helen, O Helen, the woe thou hast wrought, the grief and
the suffering!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I pity you and your unhappy fate.
Alas, it never should have come on you!
(ACHILLES *enters with a small band of armed men.*)

IPHIGENIA

O mother, mother! Armed men are coming here!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Our friend the hero, child, for whom you came.

IPHIGENIA

Open the door! Quick! Let me hide myself.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Why so?

IPHIGENIA

I cannot meet Achilles now.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Why not, I pray you?

IPHIGENIA

My marriage—I am shamed.

CLYTEMNESTRA

No time this for such whimsies! Stay here, girl!
Let all pride go, if only—

ACHILLES

Leda's child!
Daughter of sorrow.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Sorrow? True enough!

ACHILLES

A cry goes through the army, a dread cry.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What for?

ACHILLES

Your daughter—

CLYTEMNESTRA
O, that means worst!

ACHILLES
It means her murder.

CLYTEMNESTRA
No man took her part?

ACHILLES
I did: I faced their mob.

CLYTEMNESTRA
What did they do?

ACHILLES
Do? Tried to stone me.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Because you'd save my girl?

ACHILLES
Even so.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Who'd dare to lay a hand on you?

ACHILLES
Who? All the army

CLYTEMNESTRA
You had your Myrmidons?

ACHILLES
The first to turn against me.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Child, we are lost!

ACHILLES
They called me lovesick, sneered—

CLYTEMNESTRA
You answered them?

ACHILLES
No slaughter for my bride!

CLYTEMNESTRA
You answered well.

ACHILLES
Her father promised me—

CLYTEMNESTRA
Brought her from Argos.

ACHILLES
But I was shouted down—

CLYTEMNESTRA
The cursed mob!

ACHILLES
Yet I will save you.

CLYTEMNESTRA
One man against a host?

ACHILLES
You see these men-at-arms behind me?

CLYTEMNESTRA
Ay!
Now bless you for your thought!

ACHILLES
And blest we shall be.

CLYTEMNESTRA
There's hope then, and my girl need not be slain?

ACHILLES
Not while I live.

CLYTEMNESTRA
They come to seize her here?

ACHILLES
Ten thousand strong: Odysseus leads them.

CLYTEMNESTRA
He?
That son of Sisyphus?

ACHILLES
The very man.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Self-chosen was he, or elected? Which?

ACHILLES
Why, both at once.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Elected murderers!

ACHILLES
I'll keep him off.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Ah, would he drag the girl
Against her will?

ACHILLES
What else can you expect?
Seizing those long fair tresses.

CLYTEMNESTRA
O, and I?
What can I do?

ACHILLES
Hold her, and hold her fast.

CLYTEMNESTRA
O God, if that can save her, she is safe!

ACHILLES
It's come to that now.

IPHIGENIA
Mother, let me speak! [c]
This anger with my father is in vain,
Vain to use force for what we cannot win.
Thank our brave friend for all his generous zeal,
But never let us broil him with the host,
No gain to us, and ruin for himself.
I have been thinking, mother,—hear me now!—
I have chosen death: it is my own free choice.
I have put cowardice away from me.
Honour is mine now. O, mother, say I am right!

Our country—think, our Hellas—looks to me,
On me the fleet hangs now, the doom of Troy,
Our women's honour all the years to come.
My death will save them, and my name be blest,
She who freed Hellas! Life is not so sweet
I should be craven. You who bore your child,
It was for Greece you bore her, not yourself.
Think! Thousands of our soldiers stand to arms,
Ten thousand man the ships, and all on fire
To serve their outraged country, die for Greece·
And is my one poor life to hinder all?
Could we defend that? Could we call it just?
And, mother, think! How could we let our friend
Die for a woman, fighting all his folk?
A thousand women are not worth one man!
The goddess needs my blood: can I refuse?
No: take it, conquer Troy! This shall be
My husband, and my children, and my fame.
Victory, mother, victory for the Greeks!
The foreigner must never rule this land,
Our own land! They are slaves and we are free.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O maiden, all is generous in your heart,
But fortune and the goddess are to blame.

ACHILLES

Agamemnon's daughter, I had been thrice blest
If you could be my bride. Hellas and you,
Ye are happy in each other! All your words
Are grandly spoken, worthy of your land.†
I see your nature now, see what you are,
And thirst to win you, soul of nobleness!
Come, I would help you, serve you all I can,
And take you to my home. I count it ill,
By Thetis! if I may not fight the Greeks
And save you. Think; death is a fearful thing.

IPHIGENIA

I will say one word, without fear of shame.
The face of Helen has roused war enough,
Battles of men and murders O my friend,

† Omitted Passage XIII follows here.

Die not because of me, slay none for me.
Let me save Hellas if I have the power.

ACHILLES

O glorious heart! What is there I can say
Against your purpose? O, your soul is great!
Why should I not speak truth? Yet, none the less,
For it may be this thought of yours will change,
Hear what I have resolved. I will go hence,
And set my men about the altar's side,
That I may save you, and not let you die.
Even you may find a meaning in my words
When the sharp steel is close upon your neck.
Your rashness must not bring you to your death.
These men of mine shall take their stand with me
Hard by the temple, and await you there.

(ACHILLES *goes out.*)

IPHIGENIA

Mother, why are you weeping silently?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Have I not cause enough to be heart-sick?

IPHIGENIA

Hush! Do not weaken me; grant what I ask.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ask on, my child; I cannot do you wrong.

IPHIGENIA

I would not have you cut your hair for me
Nor wear black raiment—

CLYTEMNESTRA

What is it you say?

When you are lost—

IPHIGENIA

O, never speak like that!

I am saved, saved! You will be proud of me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I must not mourn?

IPHIGENIA
No place for mourning here,
No tomb.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Surely the slain have burial?

IPHIGENIA
The holy altar is my monument.

CLYTEMNESTRA
I will obey you, child; your words are good.

IPHIGENIA
My lot is good, and I do good to Greece.

CLYTEMNESTRA
What shall I tell your sisters of all this?

IPHIGENIA
Ah, do not dress them, either, in black robes!

CLYTEMNESTRA
Shall I not take some message to the girls,
Some loving word from you?

IPHIGENIA
Yes, my farewell.
And Orestes—O, take care of him for me,
And bring him up to manhood.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Hold him now,
Draw him to you, look your last look on him.

IPHIGENIA (*to* ORESTES)
Darling, you gave me all the help you could.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Is there no more that I can do to please you?

IPHIGENIA
O, hate him not,—my father, and your husband!

CLYTEMNESTRA
He has an evil course to run for you.

IPHIGENIA

He offers me to Greece against his will.

CLYTEMNESTRA

By treachery, unworthy of his house.

IPHIGENIA

Who will go with me, lead me to the place,
Before they drag me thither by the hair?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I will, beside you.

IPHIGENIA

No . . . it is not fit.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Clutching your garments.

IPHIGENIA

Listen, mother dear.
Stay here; that is far better for us both.
One of my father's men will go with me
To the field of Artemis, where I must die.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Child, are you going?

IPHIGENIA

Yes, I will not come back.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You leave your mother?

IPHIGENIA

Yes, not as I would.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O, leave me not!
(CLYTEMNESTRA *falls fainting and is carried into the tent.*)

IPHIGENIA

I will not shed a tear.
(*She turns to the women.*)
Now sing the paean for my destiny!
Sing to the child of Zeus, to Artemis;
Let the glad sound be heard by all the Greeks.

Let them lift up the baskets, light the fire,
And fling the barley; bid my father come
And touch the altar. I will bring this day
Victory and salvation unto Greece.

Follow me now, the victor,
Follow the taker of Troy!
Crown my head with a garland,
Wash my hands for the rite.
Dance!
On to the shrine of the Maiden,
Artemis the blest!
She calls me, and I,
I come as the victim, I give my blood,
Fulfil the seer's command.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O sovereign Lady, O Queen and Mother,
Now we may give you our tears.
No tears must be shed at the rite.

IPHIGENIA

Sing, O sing unto Artemis,
Queen of the Aulis-land
And the harbour-mouth,
Where the swords are athirst for me.
Farewell Pelasgia, motherland of mine!
Farewell my nurse, Mycenae!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You call on the city where Perseus dwelt,
Where the Cyclops built the walls?

IPHIGENIA

You bare me for a light to Greece.
In death I will remember you.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, your glory will not die!

IPHIGENIA

Hail! All hail!
Torch-bearer! Giver of brightness! Day!
O flame of God! I leave you, I go
To another life, to another world!
Dear sunlight, farewell, farewell!

(IPHIGENIA *goes out, with one attendant, followed by the* CHORUS *chanting solemnly.*)

CHORUS

Behold!
Behold the conqueror of Troy!
She is crowned and made pure for a goddess's joy.
She goes to the dead,
Her white neck pierced, her blood running red.

The lustral waters wait,
Her father and the army wait
For the wind that shall waft them to high-towered Troy.
Come, let us call on Artemis,
Goddess of all gods great,
Virgin, huntress and queen,
That she bless them in this!

O Maiden, glad of maiden's blood,
Send our Greeks like a flood on the treacherous town!
Let their leader be crowned by his warriors' spears
For the glory of Greece
With undying renown,
Unforgotten throughout the years.†

† Omitted Passage XIV follows here

APPENDIX

OMITTED PASSAGES

I. Lines 49–88.

AGAMEMNON

Leda, the child of Thespius, had three daughters,
Phoebe, then Clytemnestra, my own queen,
Last Helen, whom the flower of Grecian youth
Sought for in marriage. Dire the rivalry,
Breathing out slaughter against the chosen man.
Then Tyndarus her father, at a loss
Whether to give or not to give his girl
And pondering how best to meet this hap,
Bound all the suitors by a solemn oath,
Striking right hand in hand before the gods,
To help the bridegroom whom his daughter chose
Against the man, if such should ever come,
Foreign or Greek, to lure away the bride
From her true lord, fighting that man till death,
Sacking his town. And so they took the oath,—
The old man's cunning won its way with them,—
And then he bade his daughter choose herself
Where Aphrodite's dearest zephyrs blew.
And she chose one she never should have chosen,
Menelaus. Then the Phrygian came to Sparta
Who judged the goddesses, so runs the tale.
Flower-like he shone in soft embroidered raiment
Gleaming with gold and foreign luxury.
Helen and he were lovers from the first
And, Menelaus being far from home,
He fled with her to Ida's lonely steadings.
Then rushed the bridegroom to the men of Greece
Calling to mind the oath that they had sworn

To right the wronged. Straightway they flew to arms,
And came unto this narrow-mouthed deep harbour
With ship and shield and horse and chariot.
Then I was chosen leader for his sake,
My brother's. But the glory should have gone
To someone else. O would it had been so!
For now, the host assembled, here we lie
Becalmed at Aulis, helpless!

II. Lines 130–132.

Nor that I promised
To bring my daughter to his bridal-bed.

III. Lines 192–302.

And there we spied
Ajax of Salamis,
Bulwark and crown of his land,
Side by side with Ajax the Less:
Protesilaus and Prince Palamede
Of the Sea-god's line,
Playing at chess,
Mirthfully plotting their play·
And lord Diomede
Who hurled the big quoits
And laughed as he hurled,
With Meriones, the War-god's squire,
The wonder of all the world:
Odysseus the wise
From his island-hills,
And Nireus, goodliest man!
Swift as the wind
When it swiftliest flies,
Achilles the racer ran,—
Thetis bore him and Cheiron trained,—
We watched him race in his battle-gear
Pace for pace with the four-horse car
Along by the inshore sand.
We heard the shouts of the charioteer,
Eumelus, Pheres' son,
We marked the splendid horses,

The gold-wrought bridles,
The thrusting goad,
Two of them, dappled, bearing the yoke,
And two with the traces, red roan,
Wheeling the car at the turns,
Their flanks agleam in the light.
Achilles raced them, armoured, bright,
Breasting the chariot-rim,
As we gazed at the horses and him.

Then we counted the ships,
A marvellous sight,
Filling our womanish eyes with delight
Sweet as honey is sweet to the lips.
The right wing held by the Myrmidons' war,
Fifty sail of the line
With golden Nereids set for a sign
To mark Achilles' might.

Hard by as many from Argos sailed
Beneath the son of Talaos, with Sthenelus to aid
Sixty keels from Attica the child of Theseus brought;
His sign was Pallas Athena, wrought
Driving her four-horsed, swift-winged car
To carry his mariners high and far.

Then followed the battle-ships of Thebes,
Fifty farers over the seas.
Each with its blazon set on the stern,—
Golden the snake and Cadmus burn—
And earth-born Leitus led them.
From Phocis and Locris as many were manned
By Ajax the Less, lord of the Thronian land.

Next from Mycenae, the fortress of old,
A hundred ships all told
Did the son of Atreus send,
Adrastus their admiral, friend by friend
Playing his part that Greece might take
Requital for one who fled from her home
For a foreigner's sake.
And there did the sign of Nestor blaze,—
Nestor of Pylos, the ancient of days,—

Alpheus bull-foot over the foam,
Alpheus the river that runs by his home.

And twelve from Aenia under their lord
Gouneus, and beside them moored
The princes of Elis, whom men call
Epeians, Eurytus ruling all.
Near by on the waters the white oars shone
Of the Taphians with Meges, Phylus' son,
From the jagged islands that sailors dread.

Last Ajax of Salamis closed the ring,
Facing the right on the far left wing
With twelve trim vessels close-set.
All this we learnt as we scanned the fleet,
Too great for the foreigner's rafts to meet.
None could escape it if once they met!
So mighty the armament we eyed
Ourselves, and then we remember beside
All we have heard of the men.

IV. Lines 391–395.

That oath to Tyndarus was sworn by men
Mad with desire. Hope is their goddess now,
Stronger than you and all your strength. So take them,
Lead them to war. The fools will follow you,
Fools, for the gods discern what oaths are wicked
Forced upon men through their own foolishness.

V. Lines 508–510.

Lust and ambition mar a brother's bond.
Bitter the kinship grows and ill to bear.

VI. Lines 635–637.

O, let me put my arms about your neck,
Let me run first and look into your eyes,
My father! Blame me not!

VII. Line 741

All that a maid should have when she is wed.

VIII. Lines 804–809.

Things go not even here beside the strait.
Some of our host are bachelors and leave
Their houses empty: some have wife and child,
So fierce a lust hath seized men for this war
Through some strange spirit. I must claim my rights,
Let others speak for what concerns themselves.

IX. Lines 922–925.

Such men are wise and keep their judgment straight
All their lives long. For if at times 'tis sweet
To let thought go, judgment is still our need.

X. Lines 952–969.

Else savage Sipylos shall be the land
Whence we must choose the generals for our wars
And Phthia's name no more be heard by men.
Bitter shall be the water and the barley
For prophet Calchas. What's a prophet worth?
His lies are many: should he once speak truth,
It is by chance, and, should he fail, he flies
I speak not of my marriage: maids enough
Woo me, pursue me, but Agamemnon's deed
Is insult here. He should have asked my leave
Before he took my name to lure the girl.
'Twas that above all else wrought on the queen
To bring her daughter. I would have yielded her
Unto all Hellas, if in truth there were
No other way to Troy, nor withstood
My comrades' need and their great enterprise.
But I am flouted by our leaders now.
Valour and slackness are all one to them.

XI. Line 1114.

For Artemis, dark founts of spirting blood.

XII. Line 1139.

Mindless the man's mind as he shows it here

XIII. Lines 1409, 1410.

Fighting the gods no more, who master you,
You have learnt to see the right and what must be.

XIV. Lines 1532–1629. Epilogue.

(*Enter a* MESSENGER)

MESSENGER

Daughter of Tyndarus, Clytemnestra, Queen,
Come from the tent and listen to my tidings.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I hear your voice and come, but come in dread,
Trembling and shattered, fearful of more woe
And I have woes enough.

MESSENGER

My tidings, queen,
Are of your daughter, strange and marvellous.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O, tell me, tell me! Make no more delay!

MESSENGER

Dear mistress, I will tell you everything
From first to last, unless my tongue should stumble
Through my heart's haste. Soon as we reached the grove
And flowered fields of Artemis the blest
Where lay the host, bringing the maid with us,
Straightway they flocked about us. And the king,
Seeing his daughter coming for her death,
Groaned bitterly and turned his head away
Holding his cloak to hide the falling tears.
But she came up and stood beside him, saying,
"My father, I am here, to give my life
Willingly for my country, for our Greece.
Now lead me to the altar of the goddess
And sacrifice me as the seer bids.
For me, I pray now for your victory
And safe return unto our native land.
Therefore let no man lay a hand on me.
I will stand quietly; I will not flinch."
Such were her words and all the army wondered

At her great heart. And then the herald rose,
Stood in the midst, calling aloud for silence
And Calchas took the golden basket up,
Laying the sharp sword naked in the barley,
And crowned the maiden. Then Achilles came,
Lifted the basket, sprinkling all the shrine,
And made libation, crying, "Artemis,
Daughter of Zeus and huntress, queen of shades,
Guiding the light in darkness, now receive
The victim that we soldiers bring to thee,
The Achaean army and their lord and king,
This unstained body of a perfect maid.
And may there be no failing of the fleet:
Send us to Troy and let us take the town."
He spoke and all the host stood motionless,
Their eyes fixed on the ground. And the priest prayed,
Lifting the knife and gazing at her neck
To see where he should strike. Then my heart failed me,
I dropped my eyes, when lo, a sudden wonder!
All might have heard the thud, but no man saw
Where the maid vanished. Calchas cried aloud
And all the army, marking a miracle,
Unhoped-for, not to be believed, though seen
A panting hind lay in the victim's place,
Most beautiful, and deer's blood stained the altar.
Think of the joy for Calchas! He turned and cried,
"Lords of the Argives and this gathered host,
Behold the victim that the goddess chose
For her own altar, a wild doe of the hills.
She will not stain her shrine with generous blood,
Gladly she takes the substitute and grants
Passage to you and swift attack on Troy.
Now let all sailors' hearts be high and now
Go to the ships. For on this very day
We leave the Aulis hollows for the sea
And cross the open waters." Then they burned
The sacrifice to ashes and all prayed
For safe return. The king has sent me here
To tell you of the lot the gods have given
Unto your daughter and her deathless fame.
And I who saw it tell you. She has risen
Straight to the gods. So shall you lay aside
Your grief and all your anger with your lord.

The ways of the gods no mortal can foresee:
They save the souls they love. And this one day
Has known your daughter's death, your daughter's life.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O, joy has filled us now we hear these tidings!
Your daughter lives, he tells us, with the gods.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Stolen, my child, by the gods?
What gods?
Where shall I call you?
What shall I say?
An idle story to cheat my sorrow!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And here Lord Agamemnon comes himself
To tell you the same tale.

(*Enter* AGAMEMNON *from the camp*)

AGAMEMNON

Glad may we be,
Wife, for our daughter, she is with the gods.
Now take this youngling steer, and home again.
The army looks to sea. Farewell. From Troy
I will send word. May all go well with you.

CHORUS

Rejoice, O king, go forth in joy,
In joy return to us, bringing rich booty,
Home again from captured Troy.

1. *i.e.*, Paris.

2. A later tradition made Odysseus the son of Sisyphus. Allusion to this origin is always for the purpose of disparaging him.

3. Leda, to whom, according to the legend, Zeus came in the form of a swan, gave birth to Helen and the Dioscuri.

4. Euripides frequently has his characters express such sentiments as this concerning the gods.

5. These lines foreshadow the fate which ultimately awaits Agamemnon, according to the tradition.

6. This whole scene may be compared with those parts of the *Hecuba* which are concerned with Polyxena.

XVIII
RHESUS

Characters in the Play

Hector, *Prince of Ilion and General of the Trojan Armies*
Aeneas, *a Trojan Prince*
Dolon, *a Trojan*
Paris, *also called* Alexander, *brother of* Hector
Rhesus, *King of Thrace, son of the River Strymon and the* Muse of the Mountains
A Thracian, *the King's Charioteer*
Odysseus, *a Greek chieftain, famous for craft and daring*
Diomedes, *a Greek chieftain, famous for valour*
A Shepherd

The Goddess Athena
The Muse of the Mountains

Chorus *of Trojan Guards with their* Leader
Some Thracians *with their* Captain, *Attendants, etc.*

INTRODUCTION

As GILBERT MURRAY has remarked,[1] the *Rhesus* has had the misfortune to become a literary problem. Neither its date nor its authorship is certain, and opinions on these questions among scholars are widely divergent. Some believe it to be a consciously archaistic work of an unknown poet of the fourth century B.C., while others would place its date somewhere in the middle of the fifth century, while still others declare that it is a genuine but early work of Euripides. Murray, the present translator, espouses this latter view, on the basis of several rather compelling arguments. On the whole, Murray's theory seems sound, though it must be said that the great majority of critics have not held the play to be genuine.

The *Rhesus* is a dramatization of the so-called *Doloneia*, that is, the tenth book of the *Iliad*. As such it presupposes a certain acquaintance with the epic as a whole, and in a sense a reading of the *Iliad* would constitute the best introduction to this play. In fact, it proves to be a very absorbing task to compare the *Doloneia* point for point with the *Rhesus*, in order to discover those features in the former which the dramatist has altered because of the exigencies of his form. It is profitable to note likewise the additions which he has made with the result that the play has become a self-sufficient dramatic entity, with more than a merely episodic significance.

In the *Iliad*, before the tenth book, the Trojans under the leadership of Hector have gained a definite advantage. Because of his quarrel with Agamemnon, Achilles has withdrawn from the fight, and the Greeks are consequently hard-pressed. They have built a wall and ditch before their ships, which are drawn up on the shore, in order the better to resist the Trojans who are now definitely on the offensive. At the end of the eighth book, the Trojans have bivouacked on the field of battle, ready to renew the attack on the following morning. In the ninth book, the Greeks send an embassy to Achilles which attempts unsuccessfully to persuade him to rejoin the fighting. The tenth book records how Odysseus and Diomedes

[1] Murray makes this point in the introduction to the separate edition of his translation. This introduction is particularly valuable because it contains an admirable summary of the whole "*Rhesus* question."

set out during this night to spy on the Trojan camp, how Dolon was sent out simultaneously by Hector to spy on the Greeks, how the two Greek heroes captured and slew Dolon, went on to kill the recently arrived Thracian king, Rhesus, and successfully raided his camp.

The *Rhesus* presents dramatically these episodes, and as a result the play is filled with swift action and tense excitement. The Chorus does not figure largely in the play, and the odes are not particularly noteworthy, except in one or two instances, such as the lovely short lyric on the nightingale. Most critics complain that the character-drawing in the play is faulty. In some respects, this may be true, but one cannot fail to be impressed by the portrait of Hector, the conscientious, over-anxious leader, whose "wit" Aeneas does not scruple to impugn, who is eager to press the military advantage which his troops now hold. The tension of the moment makes him upbraid Rhesus upon the latter's arrival for not having brought aid sooner, and at the same time betrays him into a lack of caution which is in some ways responsible for the catastrophe to the Thracian king. At the very end of the play we are strongly drawn towards Hector, for though he says confidently that victory is in store for him, we feel he believes in his heart that, no matter what he does, defeat alone is ahead. Our attention is likewise held by the presentation of Rhesus' fate, which comes into sharp dramatic focus in the extraordinary scene when his mother, the Muse, appears and laments the death of her warrior son whose body she holds in her arms. Both this scene and the full characterization of Hector make the play more than a mere drama of war and action. Hence it seems far better to conclude that the *Rhesus* contains within it the essence of tragedy.

RHESUS

(SCENE:—*It is a cloudy but moonlight night on the plain before Troy. The Trojans and their allies have won a decisive victory and are camping on the open field close to the Greek outposts. The scene is in front of a rude tent or hut that has been set up for* HECTOR, *the Trojan leader. A watch-fire burns low in front. Far off at the back can be seen rows of watch-fires in the Greek camp. The road to Troy is in front to the left; the road to Mount Ida leads far away to the right.*

All is silence; then a noise outside. Enter tumultuously a band of Trojan Pickets.)

VARIOUS VOICES

[*The dash — in these passages indicates a new speaker*]

On to the Prince's quarters!—Ho!
Who is awake? What man-at-arms,
Or squire or groom?—Let Hector know
    New rumour of alarms
From sentinels who stand at mark
The four long watches of the dark,
While others sleep.—Uplift thine head,
O Hector! On thine elbow rise,
Unhood the eagle of thine eyes,
    Up from thy leaf-strewn bed!—

Lord Hector!

HECTOR (*coming out from the tent*)

    Who goes there? Who cries?
A friend? The watchword! . . . By what right
Do men come prowling in the night
Across my quarters? Come! Speak out.

LEADER

A picket, Lord.

HECTOR

In such a rout?

LEADER

Be not afraid, Lord.

HECTOR

I am not.
Is there an ambush? No? Then what,
In God's name, brings you from your post
With no clear tale to speak,
To spread this turmoil through a host
That lies in harness—do ye all
Know nothing?—out against the wall
And gateways of the Greek?

CHORUS (*various voices confusedly chanting*)

strophe

To arms! To arms, Lord Hector!—Send
First where the allied armies lie,
Bid them draw sword and make an end
Of sleep.—Let someone fly
And get the horses' armour on!—
Who goes with me to Panthoos' son?—
Who's for Sarpedon and the Lycians?—None
Hath seen the priest go by?—
Ho, Captain of the Runners, ho!—
Ho, Trojans of the hornèd bow!
String, string! For need is nigh.

HECTOR

Ha, silence there! . . .
First words of fear,
Then comfort. All an empty swell!
It seems the lash of trembling Pan
Hath caught you. Speak, if speak ye can.
What tidings? Not a word is clear
Of the whole tale ye tell.

(*The turmoil subsides, the* LEADER *comes forward.*)

LEADER

antistrophe

Great beacons in the Argive line
Have burned, my chief, through half the night.

The shipyard timbers seemed to shine.
Then, clear against the light,
Toward Agamemnon's tent the whole
Army in tumult seemed to roll,
As stirred by some strange voice, shoal after shoal.
A night of such discord
Was never seen. And we, in dread
Watch such things boded, turned and sped
Hither; dost blame us, Lord?

HECTOR (*after a moment of thought*)
No! Welcome, friend, with all thy tale of fear!
It shows they mean to fly: they mean to clear
Decks in the dark and so delude my sight . . .
I like that beacon-burning in the night.
O Zeus above, who checked my conquering way,
Who baulked the hungry lion of his prey
Or ever I could sweep my country clear
Of these despoilers, dost thou hate my spear?
Had but the sun's bright arrows failed me not,
I ne'er had rested till the ships were hot
With fire, and through the tents upon the plain
This bloody hand had passed and passed again!
Myself, I longed to try the battle-cast
By night, and use God's vantage to the last,
But sage and prophet, learned in the way
Of seercraft, bade me wait for dawn of day,
And then—leave no Greek living in the land.
They wait not, they, for what my prophets planned
So sagely. In the dark a runaway
Beats a pursuer.
Through our whole array
Send runners! Bid them shake off sleep and wait
Ready with shield and spear. 'Tis not too late
To catch them as they climb on board, and slash
Their crouching shoulders till the gangways splash
With blood, or teach them, fettered leg and arm,
To dig the stiff clods of some Trojan farm.

LEADER
My Prince, thy words run fast. Nor thou nor I
Have knowledge yet that the Greeks mean to fly.

HECTOR
What makes them light their beacons? Tell me, what?

LEADER
God knows! And, for my part, I like it not.

HECTOR
What, feared? Thou wouldst be feared of everything!

LEADER
They never lit such light before, O King.

HECTOR
They never fled, man, in such wild dismay.

LEADER (*yielding*)
'Twas all thy work.—Judge thou, and we obey.

HECTOR
My word is simple. Arm and face the foe.
(*A sound of marching without*)

LEADER
Who comes? Aeneas, and in haste, as though
Fraught with some sudden tiding of the night.
(*Enter* AENEAS)

AENEAS
Hector, what means it? Watchers in affright
Who gather shouting at thy doors, and then
Hold midnight council, shaking all our men?

HECTOR
To arms, Aeneas! Arm from head to heel!

AENEAS
What is it? Tidings? Doth the Argive steal
Some march, some ambush in the day's eclipse?

HECTOR
'Tis flight, man! They are marching to the ships.

AENEAS
How know'st thou?—Have we proof that it is flight?

HECTOR
They are burning beacon-fires the livelong night.
They never mean to wait till dawn. Behind

That screen of light they are climbing in the blind
Dark to their ships—unmooring from our coast.

AENEAS

(*looking towards the distant fires: after a pause*)
God guide them!—Why then do you arm the host?

HECTOR

I mean to lame them in their climbing, I
And my good spear, and break them as they fly.
Black shame it were, and folly worse than shame,
To let these spoilers go the road they came
Unpunished, when God gives them to us here.

AENEAS

Brother, I would thy wit were like thy spear!
But Nature wills not one man should be wise
In all things; each must seek his separate prize.
And thine is battle pure. There comes this word
Of beacons, on the touch thy soul is stirred:
"They fly! Out horse and chariots!"—Out withal
Past stake and trench, while night hangs like a pall!
Say, when we cross that coiling depth of dyke,
We find the foe not fled, but turned to strike;
One check there, and all hope of good return
Is gone. How can our men, returning, learn
The tricks of the palisade? The chariots how
Keep to the bridges on the trenches' brow,
Save with jammed wheels and broken axles? Aye,
And say thou conquer: other wars yet lie
Before thee. Peleus' son, for all his ire,
Will never let thee touch the ships with fire
Or pounce on his Greek lambs. The man will bide
No wrong and standeth on a tower of pride.
  Nay, brother, let the army, head on shield,
Sleep off its long day's labour in the field:
Then, send a spy; find someone who will dare
Creep to yon Argive camp. Then, if 'tis clear
They mean flight, on and smite them as they fly.
Else, if the beacons hide some strategy,
The spy will read it out, and we can call
A council.—Thus speak I, my general.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

'Tis good! 'Tis wisdom! Prince, give heed
And change the word thy passion gave.
No soldier loveth, in his need,
The glory of a chief too brave.
A spy is best: a spy, to learn
For what strange work those beacons burn
All night beside the guarded wave.

HECTOR

Ye all so wish it?—Well, ye conquer me.
(*to* AENEAS)
Go thou and calm the allies. There will be
Some stir among them, hearing of these high
And midnight councils.—I will seek the spy
To send to the Greek camp. If there we learn
Of some plot hatching, on the man's return
I straight will call thee and share counsels. So.
But wait attentive. If he says they go
Shipward and plan to escape, one trumpet call
Shall warn thee, and I wait no more, but fall
On camp and hulls, or ever dawn can rise.

AENEAS

Aye, haste and send him. Now thy plans are wise,
And when need comes I am with thee, sword by sword.
(*Exit* AENEAS)

HECTOR

(*turning to the Guards and other Soldiers*)
Ye gathered Trojans, sharers of my word,
Who dares to creep through the Greek lines alone?
Who will so help his fatherland?
Doth none
Offer? Must I do everything, one hand
Alone, to save our allies and our land?
(*A lean dark man pushes forward from the back.*)

DOLON

I, Prince!—I offer for our City's sake
To go disguised to the Greek ships, to make
Their counsels mine, and here bring word to thee.
If that be thy full service, I agree

HECTOR

Dolon the Wolf! A wise wolf and a true!
Thy father's house was praised when first I knew
Troy: this shall raise it twofold in our eyes.

DOLON

'Tis wise to do good work, but also wise
To pay the worker. Aye, and fair reward
Makes twofold pleasure, though the work be hard.

HECTOR

So be it: an honest rule. Do thou lay down
What guerdon likes thee best—short of my crown.

DOLON

I care not for thy crowned and care-fraught life.

HECTOR

Wouldst have a daughter of the King to wife?

DOLON

I seek no mate that might look down on me.

HECTOR

Good gold is ready, if that tempteth thee.

DOLON

We live at ease and have no care for gold.

HECTOR

Well, Troy hath other treasures manifold.

DOLON

Pay me not now, but when the Greeks are ta'en.

HECTOR

The Greeks! . . . Choose any save the Atreidae twain.

DOLON

Kill both, an it please thee. I make prayer for none.

HECTOR

Thou wilt not ask for Ajax, Ileus' son?

DOLON

A princely hand is skill-less at the plough.

HECTOR

'Tis ransom, then? . . . What prisoner cravest thou?

DOLON

I said before, of gold we have our fill.

HECTOR

For spoils and armour . . . thou shalt chose at will.

DOLON

Nail them for trophies on some temple wall.

HECTOR

What seeks the man? What prize more rich than all?

DOLON

Achilles' horses!

(*Murmurs of surprise*)

Yes, I need a great
Prize. I am dicing for my life with Fate.

HECTOR

'Fore God, I am thy rival, if thy love
Lies there. Undying was the breed thereof,
And these shall never die, who bear to war
Great Peleus' son, swift gleaming like a star.
Poseidon, rider of the wild sea-drift,
Tamed them, men say, and gave them for his gift
To Peleus.—None the less, since I have stirred
Hopes, I will baulk them not. I pledge my word,
Achilles' steeds, a rare prize, shall be thine.

DOLON

I thank thee.—'Tis indeed a prize more fine
Than all in Troy.—Grudge me not that; there be
Guerdons abundant for a Prince like thee.

(*Exit* HECTOR)

CHORUS (*singing*)

antistrophe

O peril strange, O fearful prize!
Yet win it and thy life hath wings:
A deed of glory in men's eyes,
A greatness, to be wooed of kings.
If God but hearken to the right,

Thou drinkest to the full this night
The cup of man's imaginings.

DOLON

(*He stands waiting a moment looking out into the dark.*)
There lies the way.—But first I must go find
At home some body-shelter to my mind;
Then, forward to the ships of Argolis!

LEADER

What other raiment wilt thou need than this?

DOLON

A garb for work, for night; a thieving guise.

LEADER

'Tis good to learn the wisdoms of the wise.
What will thy wrapping be?

DOLON

A grey wolf's hide
Shall wrap my body close on either side;
My head shall be the mask of gleaming teeth,
My arms fit in the forepaws, like a sheath,
My thighs in the hinder parts. No Greek shall tell
'Tis not a wolf that walks, half visible,
On four feet by the trenches and around
The ship-screen. When it comes to empty groun
It stands on two.—That is the plan, my friend!

LEADER

Now Maian Hermes guide thee to thy end
And home safe! Well he loves all counterfeit . . .
Good work is there; may good luck go with it!

DOLON

(*to himself, gazing out towards the Greek camp*)
There, and then back! . . . And on this belt shall bleed
Odysseus' head—or why not Diomede?—
To prove my truth. Ere dawn can touch the land
I shall be here, and blood upon my hand.

(*Exit* DOLON)

CHORUS (*singing*)
Thymbraean, Delian, Birth divine,
That walkest Lycia's inmost shrine,

Come, strong to guard, to guide, to follow,
Come, bow in hand and girt with night,
To help thy Dardans as of old,
When stone by stone thy music rolled—
O conquering Strength, O Sire Apollo!—
Young Ilion into towers of light.[3]

Grant that he reach the shipyard, creep
Keen-eyed through all that host asleep,
Then back to home and hearth, yet living,
Where now his father prays alone.
Yea, grant that, when the Greeks are slain,
Our wolf shall mount with scourge and rein
Those coursers of the sea-god's giving,
Whom Peleus drove in days foregone.

Alone in those Greek ships to stake
His life, for home and country's sake:
'Tis wondrous! Few be hearts so true
When seas across the bulwark break,
And sunlight sickens o'er the crew.
Ah, Phrygia still hath hearts of rock!
The Phrygian spear flies fast and far!
Where shall ye find the fool to mock
Our works in war?

Whom will he stab a-sleeping, whom,
The quick grey wolf, the crawling doom?
Grant that he slay the Spartan! Nay,
Or Agamemnon's head and plume
To Helen bear at dawn of day!
A lightsome dawn to hear her wail
Her brother sworn, her King who came
To Ilion with his thousand sail,
And swords, and flame!

(*As the song ends* DOLON *reappears, in the disguise of a wolf. The Guards gather round him, bidding him godspeed as he crawls off in the dark towards the Greek camp. Meantime from the direction of Mount Ida has entered a* SHEPHERD *who goes to* HECTOR'S *door and calls. The Guards seeing him return to their places.*)

SHEPHERD

Ho, Master!

(*Enter* HECTOR *from tent*)

I would it ofttimes were my luck to share
As goodly news with thee as now I bear.

HECTOR

What dulness hangs about these shepherds! Block,
Com'st thou to us with tidings of thy flock
Here in the field in arms? Who wants thee here?
Thou know'st my house; thou know'st my father's. There
Tell all about thy lucky lambs.—Now go.

SHEPHERD

Dull wits, we shepherds! Ay, 'twas alway so.
Yet still, there is some good news to be told.

HECTOR

A truce there to thy gossip of the fold!
Our dealings are of war, of sword and spear.

(*He turns to go.*)

SHEPHERD

Aye; so were mine That is what brought me here.

(HECTOR'S *manner changes.*)

A chief comes yonder, leading a great band
Of spears, with help to thee and all the land.

HECTOR

From whence? How do his name and lineage run?

SHEPHERD

He comes from Thrace, the River Strymon's son.

HECTOR

Rhesus! Not Rhesus, here on Trojan soil?

SHEPHERD

Thou hast guessed. That eases me of half my toil.

HECTOR

What makes he there towards Ida? All astray
Thus from the plain and the broad waggon-way!

SHEPHERD

I know not rightly, though one well may guess.
'Tis hard to land at night, with such a press

Of spears, on a strange coast, where rumours tell
Of foes through all the plain-land. We that dwell
On Ida, in the rock, Troy's ancient root
And hearth-stone, were well frighted, through the mute
And wolfish thickets thus to hear him break.
A great and rushing noise those Thracians make,
Marching. We, all astonied, ran to drive
Our sheep to the upmost heights. 'Twas some Argive,
We thought, who came to sweep the mountain clear
And waste thy folds; till suddenly our ear
Caught at their speech, and knew 'twas nothing Greek.
Then all our terror fled. I ran to seek
Some scout or pioneer who led the van
And called in Thracian: "Ho, what child of man
Doth lead you? From what nation do ye bring
This host with aid to Ilion and her king?"
He told me what I sought, and there I stood
Watching; and saw one gleaming like a God,
Tall in the darkness on a Thracian car.
A plate of red gold mated, like a bar,
His coursers' necks, white, white as fallen snow.
A carven targe, with golden shapes aglow,
Hung o'er his back. Before each courser's head
A Gorgon, to the frontlet riveted,
With bells set round—like stories that they tell
Of Pallas' shield—made music terrible.
The numbers of that host no pen could write
Nor reckon; 'tis a multitudinous sight,
Long lines of horsemen, lines of targeteers,
Archers abundant; and behind them veers
A wavering horde, light-armed, in Thracian weed
A friend is come to Ilion in her need
'Gainst whom no Argive, let him fly or stand,
Shall aught avail nor 'scape his conquering hand.

LEADER

Lo, when the Gods breathe gently o'er a town,
All runs to good, as water-streams run down.

HECTOR (*bitterly*)

Aye, when my spear hath fortune, when God sends
His favour, I shall find abundant friends.
I need them not; who never came of yore
To help us, when we rolled to death before

The war-swell, and the wind had ripped our sail.
Then Rhesus taught us Trojans what avail
His words are.—He comes early to the feast;
Where was he when the hunters met the beast?
Where, when we sank beneath the Argive spear?

LEADER

Well may'st thou mock and blame thy friend. Yet here
He comes with help for Troy. Accept him thou.

HECTOR

We are enough, who have held the wall till now.

LEADER

Master, dost think already that our foe
Is ta'en?

HECTOR

I do. To-morrow's light will show.

LEADER

Have care. Fate often flings a backward cast.

HECTOR

I hate the help that comes when need is past. . . .
Howbeit, once come, I bid him welcome here
As guest—not war-friend; guest to share our cheer.
The thanks are lost, he might have won from us.

LEADER

My general, to reject an ally thus
Must needs make hatred.

SHEPHERD

The mere sight of those
I saw would sure cast fear upon our foes.

HECTOR (*yielding reluctantly, with a laugh*)

Ah, well; thy words are prudent; and (*to* SHEPHERD) thine eyes
See glorious things. With all these panoplies
Of gold that filled our Shepherd's heart with joy,
Bid Rhesus welcome, as war-friend to Troy.
(*Exit* SHEPHERD; HECTOR *returns to his tent, amid the joy of the soldiers.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Now Adrasteia be near and guard
Our lips from sin, lest the end be hard!
But he cometh, he cometh, the Child of the River!
The pride of my heart it shall roll unbarred.

We carved thy coming; yea, need was strong
In the Hall of thy lovers, O child of Song;
Thy mother the Muse and her fair-bridged River
They held thee from us so long, so long!

By Strymon's torrent alone she sang,
And Strymon shivered and coiled and sprang;
And her arms went wide to the wild sweet water,
And the love of the River around her rang.

We hail thee, Fruit of the River's seed,
Young Zeus of the Dawn, on thy starry steed!
O ancient City, O Ida's daughter,
Is God the Deliverer found indeed?

And men shall tell of thee, Ilion mine,
Once more a-harping at day's decline,
'Mid laughing of lovers and lays and dances
And challenge on challenge of circling wine?

When the Greek is smitten that day shall be,
And fled to Argolis over the sea:
O mighty of hand, O leader of lances,
Smite him, and heaven be good to thee!

Thou Rider golden and swift and sheer,
Achilles falters: appear! appear!
The car like flame where the red shield leapeth,
The fell white steeds and the burning spear!

No Greek shall boast he hath seen thy face
And danced again in the dancing place;
And the land shall laugh for the sheaves she reapeth,
Of spoilers dead by a sword from Thrace.

(*Enter* RHESUS *in dazzling white armour, followed by his Charioteer and Attendants. The Charioteer carries his*

golden shield. The CHORUS *break into a shout of "All Hail!")*

LEADER

All hail, great King! A whelp indeed
Is born in Thracia's lion fold,
Whose leap shall make strong cities bleed.
Behold his body girt with gold,
And hark the pride of bells along
The frontlet of that targe's hold.

CHORUS

A God, O Troy, a God and more!
'Tis Ares' self, this issue strong
Of Strymon and the Muse of song,
Whose breath is fragrant on thy shore!
(*Re-enter* HECTOR)

RHESUS

Lord Hector, Prince of Ilion, noble son
Of noble sires, all hail! Long years have run
Since last we greeted, and 'tis joy this day
To see thy fortunes firm and thine array
Camped at the foe's gate. Here am I to tame
That foe for thee, and wrap his ships in flame.

HECTOR

Thou child of Music and the Thracian flood,
Strymonian Rhesus, truth is alway good
In Hector's eyes. I wear no double heart.
Long, long ago thou shouldst have borne thy part
In Ilion's labours, not have left us here,
For all thy help, to sink beneath the spear.
Why didst thou—not for lack of need made plain!—
Not come, not send, not think of us again?
What grave ambassadors prayed not before
Thy throne, what herald knelt not at thy door?
What pride of gifts did Troy not send to thee?
And thou, a lord of Barbary even as we,
Thou, brother of our blood, like one at sup
Who quaffs his fill and flings away the cup,
Hast flung to the Greeks my city! Yet, long since,
'Twas I that found thee but a little prince
And made thee mighty, I and this right hand;

When round Pangaion and the Paion's land,
Front against front, I burst upon the brood
Of Thrace and broke their targes, and subdued
Their power to thine. The grace whereof, not small,
Thou hast spurned, and when thy kinsmen, drowning, call,
Comest too late. Thou! Others there have been
These long years, not by nature of our kin . . .
Some under yon rough barrows thou canst see
Lie buried; they were true to Troy and me;
And others, yet here in the shielded line
Or mid the chariots, parching in the shine
Of noonday, starving in the winds that bite
Through Ilion's winter, still endure and fight
On at my side. 'Twas not their way, to lie
On a soft couch and, while the cups go by,
Pledge my good health, like thee, in Thracian wine.
I speak as a free man. With thee and thine
Hector is wroth, and tells thee to thy face.

RHESUS

Thy way is mine, friend. Straight I run my race
In word and deed, and bear no double tongue.
I tell thee, more than thine my heart was wrung,
Yea, angered past all durance, thus to stay
Back from thy battles. 'Twas a folk that lay
Hard on my borders, Scythians of the north;
Just when my host for Troy had started forth,
They fell upon our homes. I had reached the coast
Of the Friendless Sea [4] and purposed to have crossed
My Thracians there. We turned; and all that plain
Is trampled in a mire of Scythian slain
Ploughed by our spears, and blood of Thrace withal
Not stinted. This it was that drowned thy call
For help and held me back from Ilion's need.
I broke their power; the princes of their breed
I took to hostage, made their elders swear
To bring my house due tribute, year by year,
Then, never lagging, crossed the Pontus mouth,
Marched by long stages through Bithynia south
And here am come . . . not drunken with the feast,
As thou wouldst have me be, not lulled to rest
In golden chambers. In this harness hard
I have borne my nights of winter storm that starred

The Euxine into ice and scared the strong
Paeonians.
Long I have been, but not too long
To save thee yet. Friend, this is the tenth year
Thou labourest on unceasing, with no clear
Vantage; day creeps by day, and Ares throws
The same red dice for thee and for thy foes.
Now, hear my vow. Before one day's eclipse
I swear to break their wall, to burn their ships
And slay their princes. On the second day
I leave this soil and take my homeward way,
Thy pains relieved. No Trojan of the land
Need move, nor turn the buckler in his hand.
Alone my late-comers will turn the tide
And smite your Greeks, for all their bitter pride.

CHORUS (*singing*)

(*The Trojan soldiers, who have been listening with delight, here break out in irrepressible applause.*)
All hail!
Sweet words and faithful heart!
Only may Zeus avert
From those proud lips the Wrath that none may bear!
Never a galleon bore,
Now, nor in days of yore,
Prince like to thee, so valiant and so fair.
How shall Achilles, how
Shall Ajax bear him now,
Or face thy lance? May I but stand that day
Watching to see him reel
Broken beneath thy steel,
And once in blood his many murders pay!

RHESUS

Yea, more atonement thou shalt take from me
For this slow help.—May Adrasteia see
My heart and pardon!—When we two have set
Troy free from these who compass her with hate,
Soon as the Gods have had their first-fruits, I
With thee will sail—so help me Zeus on high!—
And sack all Hellas with the sword, till these
Doers of deeds shall know what suffering is.

HECTOR

By heaven, could I once see this peril rolled
Past us, and live in Ilion as of old,
Untrembling, I would thank my gods! To seek
Argos and sack the cities of the Greek—
'Twere not such light work as thou fanciest.

RHESUS

These Greeks that face thee, are they not their best?

HECTOR

We seek not better. These do all we need.

RHESUS

When these are beaten, then, we have done the deed.

HECTOR

Lose not thy path watching a distant view.

RHESUS

Thou seem'st content to suffer, not to do?

HECTOR

I have a kingdom large by mine own right. . . .

What station will best please thee in this fight
To ground the targe and stablish thine array?
Right, left, or midmost in the allies? Say.

RHESUS

'Twould please me best to fight these Greeks alone.
Yet, if 'twould irk thine honour not to have thrown
One firebrand on the ships with me, why, then
Set us to face Achilles and his men.

HECTOR

Achilles? Nay, his spear ye cannot meet.

RHESUS

How so? Fame said he sailed here with the fleet.

HECTOR

He sailed, and he is here. But some despite
'Gainst the great King now keeps him from the fight.

RHESUS

Who next to him hath honour in their host?

HECTOR

Next, to my seeming, Ajax hath the most,
Or Diomede.—But Odysseus is a tough
And subtle fox, and brave; aye, brave enough.
No man of them hath harmed us more than he
He climbed here to Athena's sanctuary
One night and stole her image clean away
To the Argive ships. Yes, and another day,
Guised as a wandering priest, in rags, he came
And walked straight through the Gates, made loud acclaim
Of curses on the Greek, spied out alone
All that he sought in Ilion, and was gone—
Gone, and the watch and helpers of the Gate
Dead! And in every ambush they have set
By the old Altar, close to Troy, we know
He sits—a murderous reptile of a foe!

RHESUS

No brave man seeks so dastardly to harm
His battle-foes; he meets them arm to arm.
This Greek of thine, this sitter like a thief
In ambush, I will make of him my chief
Care. I will take him living, drive a straight
Stake through him, and so star him at the Gate
To feed your wide-winged vultures. 'Tis the death
Most meet for a lewd thief, who pillageth
God's sanctuary, or so we hold in Thrace.

HECTOR (*making no answer*)

Seek first some sleep. There still remains a space
Of darkness.—I will show the spot that best
May suit you, somewhat sundered from the rest.
Should need arise, the password of the night
Is Phoebus: see your Thracians have it right.
(*Turning to the Guards before he goes*)
Advance beyond your stations, men, at some
Distance, and stay on watch till Dolon come
With word of the Argives' counsel. If his vow
Prosper, he should be nearing us by now.

(*Exeunt* HECTOR *and* RHESUS *and Attendants. The Guards, who have been below, come forward sleepily from the camp fire, and sit watching by* HECTOR'S *tent.*)

CHORUS

Say, whose is the watch? Who exchanges
With us? The first planets to rise
Are setting; the Pleiades seven
Move low on the margin of heaven,
And the Eagle is risen and ranges
The mid-vault of the skies.

ANOTHER

No sleeping yet! Up from your couches
And watch on, the sluggards ye are!
The moon-maiden's lamp is yet burning.

THIRD GUARD

Oh, the morning is near us, the morning!
Even now his fore-runner approaches,
Yon dim-shining star.

DIVERS GUARDS (*talking*)

Who drew the first night-watch?

ANOTHER

'Twas one
Koroibos, called the Mygdon's Son.

THE GUARD

And after?

THE OTHER

The Mount Taurus men
Had second watch: from them again
The Mysians took it. We came then.

A GUARD

'Tis surely time. Who will go tell
The fifth watch? 'Tis the Lycians' spell
By now; 'twas thus the portions fell.

ANOTHER

Nay, hearken! Again she is crying
Where death-laden Simois falls,
Of the face of dead Itys that stunned her,
Of grief grown to music and wonder:
Most changeful and old and undying
The nightingale calls.

ANOTHER

And on Ida the shepherds are waking
Their flocks for the upland. I hear
The skirl of a pipe very distant.

ANOTHER

And sleep, it falls slow and insistent.
'Tis perilous sweet when the breaking
Of dawn is so near.

DIVERS GUARDS (*talking*)

Why have we still no word nor sign
Of that scout in the Argive line?

ANOTHER

I know not; he is long delayed.

ANOTHER

God send he trip not on the blade
Of some Greek in an ambuscade!

ANOTHER

It may be. I am half afraid.

LEADER

Our time is past! Up, men, and tell
The fifth watch. 'Tis the Lycians' spell
Now, as the portions fairly fell.

(*The Guards pass out to waken the Lycians. The stage is empty and dark except for the firelight, when a whisper is heard at the back. Presently enter* ODYSSEUS *and* DIOMEDE *in dull leather armour,* DIOMEDE *carrying at his belt* DOLON'S *wolf-skin and mask.*) [6]

ODYSSEUS

Diomede, hist!—A little sound of arms
Clanking . . . or am I full of void alarms?

DIOMEDE

No. 'Tis some horse tied to the chariot rail
That clanks his chain.—My heart began to fail
A moment, till I heard the horse's champ.
(*They steal on further, keeping in the shadow.*)

ODYSSEUS
Mind—in that shade—the watchers of the camp.

DIOMEDE
I keep in shadow, but I am staring hard.

ODYSSEUS
Thou know'st the watchword, if we stir some guard?

DIOMEDE
Phoebus. 'Twas the last sign that Dolon gave.
(*They creep forward in silence to the entrance of* HECTOR'S *tent.*)

ODYSSEUS
Now, forward!
(*They dash into the tent, swords drawn; then return.*)
God! All empty as the grave!

DIOMEDE
Yet Dolon told us Hector's couch was made
Just here. For none but him I drew this blade.

ODYSSEUS
What means it? To some ambush is he gone?

DIOMEDE
Maybe, to work some craft on us at dawn.

ODYSSEUS
He is hot with courage when he is winning, hot.

DIOMEDE
What must we do, Odysseus?—He was not
Laid where we thought him, and our hopes are lost.

ODYSSEUS
Back to our own ship-rampart at all cost!
The God who gave him victory saves him still.
We cannot force Fortune against her will.

DIOMEDE
Could we not find Aeneas? Or the bed
Of Paris the accurst, and have his head?

ODYSSEUS
Go by night searching through these lines of men
For chiefs to kill? 'Twere death and death again.

DIOMEDE

But to go empty back—what shame 'twill be!—
And not one blow struck home at the enemy!

ODYSSEUS

How not one blow? Did we not baulk and kill
Dolon, their spy, and bear his tokens still?
Dost think the whole camp should be thine to quell?
(DIOMEDE *takes* DOLON'S *wolf-mask off his belt and hangs it in* HECTOR'S *tent, then turns.*) [7]

DIOMEDE

Good. Now for home! And may the end be well!
(*As they turn there appears at the back a luminous and gigantic shape, the Goddess* ATHENA.)

ATHENA

What make ye, from these sleepers thus to part
Desponding and with sorrow-wounded heart
If Hector be not granted you to slay
Nor Paris? Little know ye what great stay
Of help is found for Troy. This very night
Rhesus is come; who, if he see the light
Of morning, not Achilles nor the rack
Of Ajax' spear hath power to hold him back,
Ere wall and gate be shattered and inside
Your camp a spear-swept causeway builded wide
To where beached galleys flame above the dead.
Him slay, and all is won. Let Hector's head
Sleep where it lies and draw unvexèd breath;
Another's work, not thine, is Hector's death.

ODYSSEUS

Most high Athena, well I know the sound
Of that immortal voice. 'Tis ever found
My helper in great perils.—Where doth lie
Rhesus, mid all this host of Barbary?

ATHENA

Full near he lies, not mingled with the host
Of Troy, but here beyond the lines—a post
Of quiet till the dawn, that Hector found.
And near him, by his Thracian chariot bound,
Two snow-white coursers gleam against the wan
Moon, like the white wing of a river swan.

Their master slain, take these to thine own hearth,
A wondrous spoil, there hides not upon earth
A chariot-team of war so swift and fair.

ODYSSEUS

Say, Diomede, wilt make the men thy share,
Or catch the steeds and leave the fight to me?

DIOMEDE

I take the killing, thou the stablery:
It needs keen wit and a neat hand. The post
A man should take is where he helpeth most.

ATHENA

Behold, 'tis Paris, hasting there towards
This tent. Methinks he knoweth from the guard
Some noise of prowling Argives hither blown.

DIOMEDE

Comes he alone or with his guards?

ATHENA

Alone;
Toward Hector's quarters, as I deem, he plies
His message. He hath heard some tale of spies.

DIOMEDE

Then he shall be the first dead Trojan!

ATHENA

No;
Beyond the ordainèd end thou canst not go.
Fate hath not willed that Paris by thy deed
Shall die; it is another who must bleed
To-night. Therefore be swift!

(*Exeunt* ODYSSEUS *and* DIOMEDE)

For me, my guise
Shall melt and change in Alexander's eyes,
Yea, till he dream 'tis Cypris, his delight
And help in need, that meets him in the night,
And soft shall be my words to him I hate.
So speak I; but on whom my spell is set
He hears not, sees not, though so near I stand.
(*She becomes invisible where she stands. Enter* PARIS)

PARIS

Ho, Hector! Brother! General of the land!
Sleepest thou still? We need thy waking sight.
Our guards have marked some prowler of the night,
We know not if a mere thief or a spy.
(ATHENA *becomes visible again, but seems changed and her voice softer.*)

ATHENA

Have comfort thou! Doth not the Cyprian's eye
Mark all thy peril and keep watch above
Thy battles? How shall I forget the love
I owe thee, and thy faithful offices?
To crown this day and all its victories,
Lo, I have guided here to Troy a strong
Helper, the scion of the Muse of song
And Strymon's flood, the crownèd stream of Thrace.

PARIS (*standing like one in a dream*)

Indeed thy love is steadfast, and thy grace
Bounteous to Troy and me. Thou art the joy
And jewel of my days, which I to Troy
Have brought, and made thee hers.—O Cyprian,
I heard, not clearly,—'twas some talk that ran
Among the pickets—spies had passed some spot
Close by the camp. The men who saw them not
Talk much, and they who saw, or might have seen,
Can give no sign nor token. It had been
My purpose to find Hector where he lay.

ATHENA

Fear nothing. All is well in Troy's array.
Hector is gone to help those Thracians sleep.

PARIS

Thy word doth rule me, Goddess. Yea, so deep
My trust is, that all thought of fear is lost
In comfort, and I turn me to my post.

ATHENA

Go. And remember that thy fortunes still
Are watched by me, and they who do my will
Prosper in all their ways. Aye, thou shalt prove
Ere long, if I can care for those I love.
(*Exit* PARIS; *she raises her voice.*)

Back, back, ye twain! Are ye in love with death?
Laertes' son, thy sword into the sheath!
Our golden Thracian gaspeth in his blood;
The steeds are ours; the foe hath understood
And crowds against you. Haste ye! haste to fly,—
Ere yet the lightning falleth, and ye die!
(ATHENA *vanishes; a noise of tumult is heard. Enter a crowd of Thracians running in confusion, in the midst of them* ODYSSEUS *and* DIOMEDE.)

VOICES (*amid the tumult*)
Ha! Ha!—At them! At them! After them! Down with them!—Where are they?

CAPTAIN
Who is that fellow? Look! That yonder!

A MAN
Rascal thieves, the sort that crawl
And vex an army in the dark!

CAPTAIN
Ho, this way! Follow! This way all!
(*They pursue* ODYSSEUS *and* DIOMEDE; *catch them and bring them back.*)

A MAN
I have them! I have caught them!

CAPTAIN (*to* ODYSSEUS)
Whence comest thou? What art thou? Say; what captain and what company?

ODYSSEUS (*indignantly*)
'Tis not for thee to know. This day thou diest for thy knavery!

CAPTAIN
Stop! Give the watchword quick, before I have thy body on my pike.

ODYSSEUS (*in a tone of authority*)
Halt every man and have no fear!

CAPTAIN
Come, gather round. Be quick to strike.

ODYSSEUS (*to* CAPTAIN)
'Twas thou that killed King Rhesus!

CAPTAIN

No: 'tis I that kill the man that killed . . .
(*Flies at* ODYSSEUS, *but other men hold him back.*)

ODYSSEUS

Hold back all!

VOICES

No more holding back!

ODYSSEUS (*as they attack him*)

What, strike an ally in the field?

CAPTAIN

Then give the watchword!

ODYSSEUS

Phoebus.

CAPTAIN

Right. Ho, every man hold back his spear!—
Then know'st thou where the men are gone?

ODYSSEUS

We saw them running, somewhere here.
(*He makes off into the darkness.* DIOMEDE *follows, and some* THRACIANS.)

CAPTAIN

Off every one upon their track!

A MAN

Or should we rouse the army?

CAPTAIN

No;
To stir the allies in the night and make more panic! Let us go.
(*The* THRACIANS *go off in pursuit. Meantime the original Guards who form the* CHORUS *have hastened back. The two Greeks are presently seen crossing at the back in a different direction.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Who was the man that passed?
Who, that, so madly bold,
Even as I held him fast,
Laughed, and I loosed my hold?
Where shall I find him now?
What shall I deem of him,

To steal thro' the guards a-row,
Quaking not, eye nor limb,
On thro' the starlight dim?
Is he of Thessaly,
Born by the Locrian sea,
Or harvester of some starved island's corn?
What man hath seen his face?
What was his name or race,
What the high God by whom his sires have sworn?

DIVERS GUARDS (*talking*)

This night must be Odysseus' work, or whose?—
Odysseus? Aye, to judge by ancient use.—
Odysseus surely!—That is thy belief?—
What else? It seems he hath no fear
Of such as we!—Whom praise ye there?
Whose prowess? Say!—Odysseus.—Nay,
Praise not the secret stabbing of a thief!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

He came once, of old,
Up thro' the city throng,
Foam on his lips, a-cold,
Huddled in rags that hung
Covering just the sword
Hid in his mantle's pleat;
His face grimed and scored,
A priest of wandering feet,
Who begged his bread in the street.
Many and evil things
He cast on the brother kings
Like one long hurt, who nurseth anger sore.
Would that a curse, yea, would
The uttermost wrath of God
Had held those feet from walking Ilion's shore!

DIVERS GUARDS (*talking*)

Odysseus or another, 'tis the guard
Will weep for this. Aye, Hector will be hard.—
What will he say?—He will suspect.—Suspect?
What evil? What should make you fear?—
'Twas we that left a passage clear.—
A passage?—Yea, for these men's way,
Who came by night into the lines unchecked.

(*A sound of moaning outside in the darkness, which has been heard during the last few lines, now grows into articulate words.*)

VOICE

Woe, woe!
The burden of the wrath of fate!

GUARDS

Ha, listen! Wait.
Crouch on the ground; it may be yet
Our man is drawing to the net.

VOICE

Woe, woe!
The burden of the hills of Thrace!

LEADER

An ally? None of Hellene race.

VOICE

Woe, woe!
Yea, woe to me and woe to thee,
My master! Once to set thine eye
On Ilion the accurst, and die!

LEADER (*calling aloud*)

Ho there! What ally passes? The dim night
Blurreth mine eyes; I cannot see thee right.

VOICE

Ho, some one of the Trojan name!
Where sleeps your king beneath his shield,
Hector? What marshal of the field
Will hear our tale . . . the men who came
And struck us and were gone; and we,
We woke and there was nought to see,
But our own misery.

LEADER

I cannot hear him right; it sounds as if
The Thracians were surprised or in some grief.

(*There enters a wounded man, walking with difficulty; he is the* THRACIAN, *the Charioteer who came with* RHESUS.)

THRACIAN

The army lost and the king slain,
Stabbed in the dark! Ah, pain! pain!
This deep raw wound . . . Oh, let me die
By thy side, Master, by thy side!
In shame together let us lie
Who came to save, and failed and died.

LEADER

This needs no surmise: 'tis disaster plain
That comes. He speaketh of some ally slain.

THRACIAN

Disaster, yea: and with disaster shame,
Which lights Disaster to a twofold flame
Of evil. For to die in soldier's wise,
Since die we needs must . . . though the man who dies
Hath pain . . . to all his house 'tis praise and pride;
But we, like laggards and like fools we died!
When Hector's hand had showed us where to rest
And told the watchword, down we lay, oppressed
With weariness of that long march, and slept
Just as we fell. No further watch was kept,
Our arms not laid beside us; by the horse
No yoke nor harness ordered. Hector's force
Had victory, so my master heard, and lay
Secure, just waiting for the dawn of day
To attack. So thought we all, and our lines broke
And slept. After a little time I woke,
Thinking about my horses, that the morn
Must see them yoked for war. I found the corn
And gave them plenteously. Then in the deep
Shadow I saw two men who seemed to creep
Close by our line, but swiftly, as I stirred,
Crouched and were seeking to make off unheard.
I shouted then, and bade them keep away:
Two thieves, I thought, from the great host that lay
Round us. They never answered, and, for me,
I said no more but turned and presently
Was sleeping. In my sleep there came a dream.
I seemed to see the horses—mine own team
I had trained long since and drove at Rhesus' side—
But wolves were on their backs, wolves, couched astride,

Who drove and scourged; I saw the horses rear
And stagger with wide nostrils, stiff with fear,
And, starting up to drive the beasts away,
I woke.—A terror of great darkness lay
About me, but I lifted up my head
And listened. There was moaning, like the dead
That moan at night, and over me there flowed,
So soft, so warm—it was my master's blood,
Who writhed beside me, dying! With a bound
I sprang up, empty-handed, groping round
For spear or sword, when, lo, a young strong man
Was close to me and slashed, and the sword ran
Deep through my flank. I felt its passage well,
So deep, so wide, so spreading . . . then I fell.
And they, they got the bridles in their hand
And fled . . . Ah! Ah! This pain. I cannot stand.
(*The Guards catch him as he reels, and lay him on the ground.*)
I know, I saw, thus much. But why or how
Those dead men went to death I cannot know,
Nor by whose work. But this I say; God send
'Tis not foul wrong wrought on us by a friend.

LEADER

Good charioteer of that ill-fortuned king,
Suspect us not. 'Tis Greeks have done this thing.
But yonder Hector comes. He hath been shown
The foul deed, and thy sorrows are his own.
(*Enter* HECTOR *in wrath, with a band of Guards*)

HECTOR

Ye workers of amazement! Have your eyes
No sight? Ye watch and let these Argive spies
Pass—and our friends are butchered in their sleep—
And then pass back unwounded, laughing deep
Amid the galleys at the news they bring
Of Trojan sluggards and the fool their king?
Great God, ye never baulked them as they came,
Nor smote them as they went!
(*His eye falls on the* CAPTAIN.)
Who bears the blame
Of this but thou? Thou wast the watcher set
To guard this host till morn. I tell thee yet
For this deed—I have sworn by Zeus our Lord!—
The scourge of torment or the headsman's sword

Awaits thee. Else, be Hector in your thought
Writ down a babbler and a man of nought.

LEADER (*grovelling before* HECTOR)

Woe, woe! It was for thee, only for thee,
I must have gone, O Help and Majesty,
That time with message that the fires were burning.
Mine eye was keen; I swear by Simois river,
It never drooped nor slumbered, never, never,
From eve till morning!
My master, verily, I am innocent utterly,
Build not such wrath against me, Lord, nor harden
Thy heart; let Time be judge; and if in deed
Or word I have offended, let me bleed!
Bury me here alive! I ask no pardon.

(HECTOR *is standing over him ready to strike when the Charioteer speaks.*)

THRACIAN

Why threaten them? Art thou a Greek to blind
My barbarous wit so nimbly, in a wind
Of words? This work was thine. And no man's head
Is asked by us, the wounded and the dead,
Save thine. It needs more play, and better feigned,
To hide from me that thou hast slain thy friend
By craft, to steal his horses.—That is why
He stabs his friends. He prays them earnestly,
Prays them to come; they came and they are dead.
A cleaner man was Paris, when he fled
With his host's wife. He was no murderer.
Profess not thou that any Greek was there
To fall on us. What Greek could pass the screen
Of Trojan posts in front of us, unseen?
Thyself was stationed there, and all thy men
What man of yours was slain or wounded when
Your Greek spies came? Not one; 'tis we, behind,
Are wounded, and some worse than wounded, blind
Forever to the sunlight. When we seek
Our vengeance, we shall go not to the Greek.
What stranger in that darkness could have trod
Straight to where Rhesus lay—unless some God
Pointed his path? They knew not, whispered not,
Rhesus had ever come. . . . 'Tis all a plot.

HECTOR (*steadied and courteous again*)
Good allies I have had since first the Greek
Set foot in Troy, and never heard them speak
Complaint of Hector. Thou wilt be the first.
I have not, by God's mercy, such a thirst
For horses as to murder for their sake.
(*He turns to his own men.*)
Odysseus! Yet again Odysseus! Take
All the Greek armies, is there one but he
Could have devised, or dared, this devilry?
I fear him; yea, fear in mine own despite,
Lest Dolon may have crossed him in the night
And perished; 'tis so long he cometh not.

THRACIAN
I know not who Odysseus is, nor what.
I know it was no Greek that wounded us.

HECTOR
To think thus pleasures thee? Well, have it thus.

THRACIAN
Home, home! To die at home and rest my head!

HECTOR
Nay, die not, friend. We have enough of dead.

THRACIAN
How can I live? Lost, and my master slain.

HECTOR
My house will shelter thee and heal thy pain.

THRACIAN
Thy house? Will murderers' nursing give me peace?

HECTOR
Still the same tale! This man will never cease.

THRACIAN
My curse rest—not on Hector, but on those
Who stabbed us, as thou say'st.—Ah, Justice knows!

HECTOR
There, lift him.—Bear him to my house. Take pains,
If care can do it, that the man complains

No more of Troy.—Ye others, bear withal
To Priam and the Elders of the Wall
My charge, that, where the cart-road from the plain
Branches, they make due burial for our slain.
(*One party of Guards lifts carefully the wounded* THRACIAN *and goes off bearing him: another departs with the message to Troy.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Back from the heights of happiness,
Back, back, to labour and distress
Some god that is not ours doth lead
Troy and her sons; He sows the seed,
Who knows the reaping?
(*In the air at the back there appears a Vision of the* MUSE *holding the body of her dead son* RHESUS.)
Ah! Ah!
My king, what cometh? There appears
Some Spirit, like a mist of tears;
And in her arms a man lieth,
So young, so wearied unto death;
To see such vision presageth
Wrath and great weeping.
(*The Guards hide their heads in their mantles.*)

MUSE

Nay, look your fill, ye Trojans. It is I,
The many-sistered Muse, of worship high
In wise men's hearts, who come to mourn mine own
Most pitifully loved, most injured, son,
For whose shed blood Odysseus yet shall pay
Vengeance, who crawled and stabbed him where he lay.

With a dirge of the Thracian mountains,
I mourn for thee, O my son.
For a mother's weeping, for a galley's launching, for the way to Troy;
A sad going, and watched by spirits of evil.
His mother chid him to stay, but he rose and went.
His father besought him to stay, but he went in anger.
Ah, woe is me for thee, thou dear face,
My belovèd and my son!

LEADER

Goddess, if tears for such as thee may run
In our low eyes, I weep for thy dead son.

MUSE

I say to thee: Curse Odysseus,
And cursèd be Diomede!
For they made me childless, and forlorn for ever, of the flower of sons.
Yea, curse Helen, who left the houses of Hellas.
She knew her lover, she feared not the ships and sea.
She called thee, called thee, to die for the sake of Paris,
Belovèd, and a thousand cities
She made empty of good men.
O conquered Thamyris, is this thy bane
Returned from death to pierce my heart again?
Thy pride it was, and bitter challenge cast
'Gainst all the Muses, did my flesh abase
To bearing of this Child, what time I passed
Through the deep stream and looked on Strymon's face,
And felt his great arms clasp me, when to old
Pangaion and the earth of hoarded gold
We Sisters came with lutes and psalteries,
Provoked to meet in bitter strife of song
That mountain wizard, and made dark the eyes
Of Thamyris, who wrought sweet music wrong.
I bore thee, Child; and then, in shame before
My sisterhood, my dear virginity,
I stood again upon thy Father's shore
And cast thee to the deeps of him; and he
Received and to no mortal nursing gave
His child, but to the Maidens of the Wave.
And well they nursed thee, and a king thou wast
And first of Thrace in war; yea, far and near
Through thine own hills thy bloody chariot passed,
Thy battered helm flashed, and I had no fear;
Only to Troy I charged thee not to go:
I knew the fated end: but Hector's cry,
Borne overseas by embassies of woe,
Called thee to battle for thy friends and die.

And thou, Athena—nothing was the deed
Odysseus wrought this night nor Diomede—

'Tis thine, all thine; dream not thy cruel hand
Is hid from me! Yet ever on thy land
The Muse hath smiled; we gave it praise above
All cities, yea, fulfilled it with our love.
The light of thy great Mysteries was shed
By Orpheus, very cousin of this dead
Whom thou hast slain, and thine high citizen
Musaeus, wisest of the tribes of men,
We and Apollo guided all his way:
For which long love behold the gift ye pay!
I wreathe him in my arms; I wail his wrong
Alone, and ask no other mourner's song.
(*She weeps over* RHESUS.)

LEADER

Hector, thou hearest. We were guiltless here,
And falsely spake that Thracian charioteer.

HECTOR

Always I knew it. Had we any need
Of seers to tell this was Odysseus' deed?
For me, what could I else, when I beheld
The hosts of Argos camped upon this field,
What but with prayers and heralds bid my friend
Come forth and fight for Ilion ere the end?
He owed me that.—Yet, now my friend is slain,
His sorrow is my sorrow. On this plain
I will uplift a wondrous sepulchre,
And burn about it gifts beyond compare
Of robes and frankincense. To Troy's relief
He came in love and parteth in great grief.

MUSE

My son shall not be laid in any grave
Of darkness; thus much guerdon will I crave
Of Death's eternal bride, the heavenly-born
Maid of Demeter, Life of fruits and corn,
To set this one soul free. She owes me yet,
For Orpheus widowed, an abiding debt.
To me he still must be—that know I well—
As one in death, who sees not. Where I dwell
He must not come, nor see his mother's face.
Alone for ever, in a caverned place
Of silver-veinèd earth, hid from men's sight,

A Man yet Spirit, he shall live in light:
As under far Pangaion Orpheus lies,
Priest of great light and worshipped of the wise.
  Howbeit an easier anguish even to me
Falls than to Thetis in her azure sea;
For her son too shall die; and sorrowing,
First on the hills our band for thee shall sing,
Then for Achilles by the weeping wave.
Pallas could murder thee, but shall not save
Thy foe; too swift Apollo's bolt shall fly.
  O fleshly loves of sad mortality,
O bitter motherhood of these that die,
She that hath wisdom will endure her doom,
The days of emptiness, the fruitless womb;
Not love, not bear love's children to the tomb.
(*The* VISION *rises through the air and vanishes.*)

LEADER

The dead man sleepeth in his mother's care;
But we who battle still—behold, the glare
Of dawn that rises. Doth thy purpose hold,
Hector, our arms are ready as of old.

HECTOR

March on; and bid the allies with all speed
Be armed, bind fast the yoke upon the steed,
Then wait with torches burning, till we sound
The Tuscan trump.—This day we shall confound,
God tells me, their Greek phalanx, break their high
Rampart and fire the galleys where they lie.
(*Pointing to the dawn*)
Yon first red arrow of the Sun, that brings
The dawn to Troy, hath freedom on his wings.

(*During the following lines* HECTOR *goes to his tent to get his shield, and as he enters sees* DOLON'S *bloody wolf-skin hanging. He takes it, looks at it, and throws it down without a word.*[8] *Then he puts on his helmet, takes his shield and spear, and follows the Guards as they march off.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

The Chief hath spoken: let his will
  Be law, ye Trojans—Raise the cry
To Arms! To Arms! and down the line

Of allies pass the battle-sign.
The God of Ilion liveth still;
And men may conquer ere they die.

(*Exeunt*)

1. These horses were particularly famous. Cf. especially the end of Book XVI of the *Iliad;* also the end of Book XIX.

2. This stage direction, as well as some others in the play, is conjectural, as Murray indicates in his notes. Hence they all should be regarded as means employed by the translator to sharpen his interpretation of the dramatic action.

3. The reference is to the part Apollo played according to the legend in building the walls of Troy.

4. *i.e.,* the Euxine or the Black Sea. Murray is evidently taking the etymological meaning of Euxine, which is friendly or hospitable, to be a euphemism.

5. Hector is alluding to various exploits performed by Odysseus earlier in the war. Cf., *e.g., Odyssey,* Book IV, lines 242 ff., and Book XIV, lines 468 ff.

6. Cf. note 2. Murray gives plausible reasons in his notes for supposing that Odysseus and Diomedes bring in the wolf-skin taken from Dolon, and leave it in Hector's tent.

7. Cf. notes 2 and 6.

8. Cf. notes 2 and 6.

XIX
THE CYCLOPS

Characters in the Play

Silenus, *old servant of the* Cyclops
Chorus of Satyrs
Odysseus
The Cyclops
Companions of Odysseus

INTRODUCTION

The Cyclops, for the date of which there is no available information, is very significant for the history of Greek drama because it is the only complete satyr-play which is now extant. From it therefore we can reasonably infer what was expected of the tragic poet in his fourth play, when he submitted a tetralogy in the dramatic competitions. The satyr-play apparently had to be considerably lighter in tone than the tragedy, and yet not be completely divorced from the tragic context. Hence it seems to occupy a kind of middle ground between tragedy and straight comedy. As such it served not only to test the creative virtuosity of the tragic poet, but also to provide in its presentation welcome relief to an audience which had just witnessed three tragedies in succession.

Like the *Rhesus, The Cyclops* is a dramatization of an episode from the epic. In this play, Euripides presents the familiar story of Odysseus' adventures with the Cyclops, Polyphemus, which is found in the ninth book of the *Odyssey.* The playwright has not departed from his epic source to any great extent. He has, to be sure, added a Chorus of Satyrs and the character Silenus, whom he presents as enslaved in the service of the Cyclops. From these additions Euripides is able to derive much of the humour in his play. Odysseus himself proves to be the butt of some very amusing satire, while the scene in which the Cyclops becomes drunk is excellent broad comedy. Polyphemus fortunately engages in his cannibal activity off-stage, and hence this phase of the play cannot be taken too seriously. The incident, however, illustrates nicely the difference between the satyr-play and comedy, for it is easy to see that the Cyclops story as subject-matter would be definitely inappropriate to the latter medium. If Euripides' piece is a typical satyr-play, we can readily understand the part which this form was expected to play in the Greek dramatic festivals.

THE CYCLOPS

(SCENE:—*Before the great cave of the* CYCLOPS *at the foot of Mount Aetna.* SILENUS *enters. He has a rake with him, with which he cleans up the ground in front of the cave as he soliloquizes.*)

SILENUS

O BROMIUS, unnumbered are the toils I bear because of thee, no less now than when I was young and hale; first, when thou wert driven mad by Hera and didst leave the mountain nymphs, thy nurses; next, when in battle with earth-born spearmen I stood beside thee on the right as squire, and slew Enceladus, smiting him full in the middle of his targe with my spear. Come, though, let me see; must I confess 'twas all a dream? No, by Zeus! since I really showed his spoils to the Bacchic god. And now am I enduring to the full a toil still worse than those. For when Hera sent forth a race of Tyrrhene pirates against thee, that thou mightest be smuggled far away, I, as soon as the news reached me, sailed in quest of thee with my children; and, taking the helm myself, I stood on the end of the stern and steered our trim craft; and my sons, sitting at the oars, made the grey billows froth and foam as they sought thee, my liege. But just as we had come nigh Malea in our course, an east wind blew upon the ship and drove us hither to the rock of Aetna, where in lonely caverns dwell the one-eyed children of ocean's god, the murdering Cyclopes. Captured by one of them we are slaves in his house; Polyphemus they call him whom we serve, and instead of Bacchic revelry we are herding a godless Cyclops's flocks; and so it is my children, striplings as they are, tend the young thereof on the edge of the downs; while my appointed task is to stay here and fill the troughs and sweep out the cave, or wait upon the ungodly Cyclops at his impious feasts. His orders now compel obedience; I have to scrape out his house with the rake you see, so as to receive the Cyclops, my absent master, and his sheep in clean caverns

But already I see my children driving their browsing flocks towards me.

What means this? is the beat of feet in the Sicinnis dance the same to

you now as when ye attended the Bacchic god in his revelries and made your way with dainty steps to the music of lyres to the halls of Althaea?

(*The* CHORUS OF SATYRS *enters, driving a flock of goats and sheep. Servants follow them.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Offspring of well-bred sires and dams, pray whither wilt thou be gone from me to the rocks? Hast thou not here a gentle breeze, and grass to browse, and water from the eddying stream set near the cave in troughs? and are not thy young ones bleating for thee? Pst! pst! wilt thou not browse here, here on the dewy slope? Ho! ho! ere long will I cast a stone at thee. Away, away! O horned one, to the fold-keeper of the Cyclops, the country-ranging shepherd.

antistrophe

Loosen thy bursting udder; welcome to thy teats the kids, whom thou leavest in the lambkins' pens. Those little bleating kids, asleep the livelong day, miss thee; wilt then leave at last the rich grass pastures on the peaks of Aetna and enter the fold? . . .

epode

Here we have no Bromian god; no dances here, or Bacchantes thyrsus-bearing; no roll of drums, or drops of sparkling wine by gurgling founts; nor is it now with Nymphs in Nysa I sing a song of Bacchus, Bacchus! to the queen of love, in quest of whom I once sped on with Bacchantes, white of foot. Dear friend, dear Bacchic god, whither art roaming alone, waving thy auburn locks, while I, thy minister, do service to the one-eyed Cyclops, a slave and wanderer I, clad in this wretched goat-skin dress, severed from thy love?

SILENUS

Hush, children! and bid our servants fold the flocks in the rock-roofed cavern.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to Servants*)

Away! (*To* SILENUS) But prithee, why such haste, father?

SILENUS

I see the hull of a ship from Hellas at the shore, and men, that wield the oar, on their way to this cave with some chieftain. About their necks they carry empty vessels and pitchers for water; they are in want of food. Luckless strangers! who can they be? They know not what manner of man our master Polyphemus is, to have set foot here in his cheerless abode

and come to the jaws of the cannibal Cyclops in an evil hour. But hold ye your peace, that we may inquire whence they come to the peak of Sicilian Aetna.

(ODYSSEUS *and his companions enter. They carry baskets for provisions and water jars.*)

ODYSSEUS

Pray tell us, sirs, of some river-spring whence we might draw a draught to slake our thirst, or of someone willing to sell victuals to mariners in need.

Why, what is this? We seem to have chanced upon a city of the Bromian god; here by the caves I see a group of Satyrs. To the eldest first I bid "All hail!"

SILENUS

All hail, sir! tell me who thou art, and name thy country.

ODYSSEUS

Odysseus of Ithaca, king of the Cephallenians' land.

SILENUS

I know him for a prating knave, one of Sisyphus' shrewd offspring.[1]

ODYSSEUS

I am the man; abuse me not.

SILENUS

Whence hast thou sailed hither to Sicily?

ODYSSEUS

From Ilium and the toils of Troy.

SILENUS

How was that? didst thou not know the passage to thy native land?

ODYSSEUS

Tempestuous winds drove me hither against my will.

SILENUS

God wot! thou art in the same plight as I am.

ODYSSEUS

Why, wert thou too drifted hither against thy will?

SILENUS

I was, as I pursued the pirates who carried Bromius off.

ODYSSEUS
What land is this and who are its inhabitants?

SILENUS
This is mount Aetna, the highest point in Sicily.

ODYSSEUS
But where are the city-walls and ramparts?

SILENUS
There are none; the headlands, sir, are void of men.

ODYSSEUS
Who then possess the land? the race of wild creatures?

SILENUS
The Cyclopes, who have caves, not roofed houses

ODYSSEUS
Obedient unto whom? or is the power in the people's hands?

SILENUS
They are rovers; no man obeys another in anything.

ODYSSEUS
Do they sow Demeter's grain, or on what do they live?

SILENUS
On milk and cheese and flesh of sheep.

ODYSSEUS
Have they the drink of Bromius, the juice of the vine?

SILENUS
No indeed! and thus it is a joyless land they dwell in.

ODYSSEUS
Are they hospitable and reverent towards strangers?

SILENUS
Strangers, they say, supply the daintiest meat.

ODYSSEUS
What, do they delight in killing men and eating them?

SILENUS
No one has ever arrived here without being butchered.

ODYSSEUS
Where is the Cyclops himself? inside his dwelling?

SILENUS
He is gone hunting wild beasts with hounds on Aetna.

ODYSSEUS
Dost know then what to do, that we may be gone from the land?

SILENUS
Not I, Odysseus; but I would do anything for thee.

ODYSSEUS
Sell us food, of which we are in need.

SILENUS
There is nothing but flesh, as I said.

ODYSSEUS
Well, even that is a pleasant preventive of hunger.

SILENUS
And there is cheese curdled with fig-juice, and the milk of kine.

ODYSSEUS
Bring them out; a man should see his purchases.

SILENUS
But tell me, how much gold wilt thou give me in exchange?

ODYSSEUS
No gold bring I, but Dionysus' drink.

SILENUS (*joyfully*)
Most welcome words! I have long been wanting that.

ODYSSEUS
Yes, it was Maron, the god's son, who gave me a draught.

SILENUS
What! Maron whom once I dandled in these arms?

ODYSSEUS
The son of the Bacchic god, that thou mayst learn more certainly.

SILENUS
Is it inside the ship, or hast thou it with thee?

ODYSSEUS
This, as thou seest, is the skin that holds it, old sir.

SILENUS
Why, that would not give me so much as a mouthful.

ODYSSEUS
This, and twice as much again as will run from the skin.

SILENUS
Fair the rill thou speakest of, delicious to me.

ODYSSEUS
Shall I let thee taste the wine unmixed, to start with?

SILENUS
A reasonable offer; for of a truth a taste invites the purchase.

ODYSSEUS
Well, I haul about a cup as well as the skin.

SILENUS
Come, let it gurgle in, that I may revive my memory by a pull at it.

ODYSSEUS (*pouring*)
There then!

SILENUS (*smelling it*)
Ye gods! what a delicious scent it has!

ODYSSEUS
What! didst thou see it?

SILENUS
No, i' faith, but I smell it.

ODYSSEUS
Taste it then, that thy approval may not stop at words.

SILENUS (*taking a drink*)
Zounds! Bacchus is inviting me to dance; ha! ha!

ODYSSEUS
Did it not gurgle finely down thy throttle?

SILENUS
Aye that it did, to the ends of my fingers.

ODYSSEUS

Well, we will give thee money besides.

SILENUS

Only undo the skin, and never mind the money.

ODYSSEUS

Bring out the cheeses then and lambs.

SILENUS

I will do so, with small thought of any master. For let me have a single cup of that and I would turn madman, giving in exchange for it the flocks of every Cyclops and then throwing myself into the sea from the Leucadian rock, once I have been well drunk and smoothed out my wrinkled brow. For if a man rejoice not in his drinking, he is mad; for in drinking it's possible for this to stand up straight, and then to fondle breasts, and to caress well tended locks, and there is dancing withal, and oblivion of woe. Shall not I then purchase so rare a drink, bidding the senseless Cyclops and his central eye go hang?

(SILENUS *goes into the cave.*)

LEADER

Hearken, Odysseus, let us hold some converse with thee.

ODYSSEUS

Well, do so; ours is a meeting of friends.

LEADER

Did you take Troy and capture the famous Helen?

ODYSSEUS

Aye, and we destroyed the whole family of Priam.

LEADER

After capturing your blooming prize, were all of you in turn her lovers? for she likes variety in husbands; the traitress! the sight of a man with embroidered breeches on his legs and a golden chain about his neck so fluttered her, that she left Menelaus, her excellent little husband. Would there had never been a race of women born into the world at all, unless it were for me alone!

SILENUS (*reappearing with food*)

Lo! I bring you fat food from the flocks, king Odysseus, the young of bleating sheep and cheeses of curdled milk without stint. Carry them away with you and begone from the cave at once, after giving me a drink of merry grape-juice in exchange.

LEADER

Alack! yonder comes the Cyclops; what shall we do?

ODYSSEUS

Then truly are we lost, old sir! whither must we fly?

SILENUS

Inside this rock, for there ye may conceal yourselves.

ODYSSEUS

Dangerous advice of thine, to run into the net!

SILENUS

No danger; there are ways of escape in plenty in the rock.

ODYSSEUS

No, never that; for surely Troy will groan and loudly too, if we flee from a single man, when I have oft withstood with my shield a countless host of Phrygians. Nay, if die we must, we will die a noble death; or, if we live, we will maintain our old renown at least with credit.

(*The* CYCLOPS *enters as* SILENUS *goes into the cave. The* CYCLOPS, *not noticing* ODYSSEUS *and his companions, addresses the* CHORUS *in anger.*)

CYCLOPS

A light here! hold it up! what is this? what means this idleness, your Bacchic revelry? Here have we no Dionysus, nor clash of brass, nor roll of drums. Pray, how is it with my newly-born lambs in the caves? are they at the teat, running close to the side of their dams? Is the full amount of milk for cheeses milked out in baskets of rushes? How now? what say you? One of ye will soon be shedding tears from the weight of my club, look up, not down.

LEADER

There! my head is bent back till I see Zeus himself; I behold both the stars and Orion.

CYCLOPS

Is my breakfast quite ready?

LEADER

'Tis laid, be thy throat only ready.

CYCLOPS

Are the bowls too full of milk?

LEADER

Aye, so that thou canst swill off a whole hogshead, so it please thee.

CYCLOPS

Sheep's milk or cows' milk or a mixture of both?

LEADER

Whichever thou wilt, don't swallow me, that's all.

CYCLOPS

Not I; for you would start kicking in the pit of my stomach and kill me by your antics. (*Catching sight of* ODYSSEUS *and his followers*) Ha! what is this crowd I see near the folds? Some pirates or robbers have put in here. (SILENUS *comes out of the cave. He has made himself appear as though he had just suffered a terrible beating.*) Yes, I really see the lambs from my caves tied up there with twisted osiers, cheese-presses scattered about, and old Silenus with his bald pate all swollen with blows.

SILENUS

Oh! oh! poor wretch that I am, pounded to a fever.

CYCLOPS

By whom? who has been pounding thy head, old sirrah?

SILENUS

These are the culprits, Cyclops, all because I refused to let them plunder thee.

CYCLOPS

Did they not know I was a god and sprung from gods?

SILENUS

That was what I told them, but they persisted in plundering thy goods, and, in spite of my efforts, they actually began to eat the cheese and carry off the lambs; and they said they would tie thee in a three-cubit pillory and tear out thy bowels by force at thy navel, and flay thy back thoroughly with the scourge; and then, after binding thee, fling thy carcase down among the benches of their ship to sell to someone for heaving up stones, or else throw thee into a mill.

CYCLOPS

Oh, indeed! Be off then and sharpen my cleavers at once; heap high the faggots and light them; for they shall be slain forthwith and fill this maw of mine, what time I pick my feast hot from the coals, waiting not for carvers, and fish up the rest from the cauldron boiled and sodden; for I have had my fill of mountain-fare and sated myself with banquets of lions and stags, but 'tis long I have been without human flesh.

SILENUS

Truly, master, a change like this is all the sweeter after everyday fare; for just of late there have been no fresh arrivals of strangers at these caves.

ODYSSEUS

Hear the strangers too in turn, Cyclops. We had come near the cave from our ship, wishing to procure provisions by purchase, when this fellow sold us the lambs and handed them over for a stoup of wine to drink himself,—a voluntary act on both sides,—there was no violence employed at all. No, there is not a particle of truth in the story he tells, now that he has been caught selling thy property behind thy back.

SILENUS

I? Perdition catch thee!

ODYSSEUS

If I am lying, yes.

SILENUS (*in agitation*)

O Cyclops, by thy sire Poseidon, by mighty Triton and Nereus, by Calypso and the daughters of Nereus, by the sacred billows and all the race of fishes! I swear to thee, most noble sir, dear little Cyclops, master mine, it is not I who sell thy goods to strangers, else may these children, dearly as I love them, come to an evil end.

LEADER

Keep that for thyself, with my own eyes I saw thee sell the goods to the strangers; and if I lie, perdition catch my sire! but injure not the strangers.

CYCLOPS

Ye lie, for my part I put more faith in him than Rhadamanthus, declaring him more just. But I have some questions to ask. Whence sailed ye, strangers? of what country are you? what city was it nursed your childhood?

ODYSSEUS

We are Ithacans by birth, and have been driven from our course by the winds of the sea on our way from Ilium, after sacking its citadel.

CYCLOPS

Are ye the men who visited on Ilium, that bordereth on Scamander's wave, the rape of Helen, worst of women?

ODYSSEUS

We are; that was the fearful labour we endured.

CYCLOPS

A sorry expedition yours, to have sailed to the land of Phrygia for the sake of one woman!

ODYSSEUS

It was a god's doing; blame not any son of man. But thee do we implore, most noble son of Ocean's god, speaking as free-born men; be not so cruel as to slay thy friends on their coming to thy cave, nor regard us as food for thy jaws, an impious meal; for we preserved thy sire, O king, in possession of his temple-seats deep in the nooks of Hellas; and the sacred port of Taenarus and Malea's furthest coves remain unharmed; and Sunium's rock, the silver-veined, sacred to Zeus-born Athena, still is safe, and Geraestus, the harbour of refuge; and we did not permit Phrygians to put such an intolerable reproach on Hellas. Now in these things thou too hast a share, for thou dwellest in a corner of the land of Hellas beneath Aetna's fire-streaming rock; and although thou turn from arguments, still it is a custom amongst mortal men to receive shipwrecked sailors as their suppliants and show them hospitality and help them with raiment; not that these should fill thy jaws and belly, their limbs transfixed with spits for piercing ox-flesh. The land of Priam hath emptied Hellas quite enough, drinking the blood of many whom the spear laid low, with the ruin it has brought on widowed wives, on aged childless dames, and hoary-headed sires; and if thou roast and consume the remnant,—a meal thou wilt rue,—why, where shall one turn? Nay, be persuaded by me, Cyclops; forego thy ravenous greed and choose piety rather than wickedness; for on many a man ere now unrighteous gains have brought down retribution.

SILENUS

I will give thee a word of advice! as for his flesh, leave not a morsel of it, and if thou eat his tongue, Cyclops, thou wilt become a monstrous clever talker.

CYCLOPS

Wealth, manikin, is the god for the wise; all else is mere vaunting and fine words. Plague take the headlands by the sea, on which my father seats himself! Why hast thou put forward these arguments? I shudder not at Zeus's thunder, nor know I wherein Zeus is a mightier god than I, stranger; what is more, I reck not of him; my reasons hear. When he pours down the rain from above, here in this rock in quarters snug, feasting on roast calf's flesh or some wild game and moistening well my up-

turned paunch with deep draughts from a tub of milk, I rival the thunderclaps of Zeus with my artillery; and when the north wind blows from Thrace and sheddeth snow, I wrap my carcase in the hides of beasts and light a fire, and what care I for snow? The earth perforce, whether she like it or not, produces grass and fattens my flocks, which I sacrifice to no one save myself and this belly, the greatest of deities; but to the gods, not I! For surely to eat and drink one's fill from day to day and give oneself no grief at all, this is the king of gods for your wise man, but lawgivers go hang, chequering, as they do, the life of man! And so I will not cease from indulging myself by devouring thee; and thou shalt receive this stranger's gift, that I may be free of blame,—fire and my father's element yonder, and a cauldron to hold thy flesh and boil it nicely in collops. So in with you, that ye may feast me well, standing round the altar to honour the cavern's god.

(*The* CYCLOPS *goes into his cave, driving* ODYSSEUS' *men before him.*)

ODYSSEUS

Alas! escaped from the troubles of Troy and the sea, my barque now strands upon the whim and forbidding heart of this savage.

O Pallas, mistress mine, goddess-daughter of Zeus, help me, help me now; for I am come to toils and depths of peril worse than all at Ilium; and thou, O Zeus, the stranger's god, who hast thy dwelling 'mid the radiant stars, behold these things; for, if thou regard them not, in vain art thou esteemed the great god Zeus, though but a thing of naught.

(*He follows the* CYCLOPS *reluctantly.* SILENUS *also goes in.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ope wide the portal of thy gaping throat, Cyclops; for strangers' limbs, both boiled and grilled, are ready from off the coals for thee to gnaw and tear and mince up small, reclining in thy shaggy goat-skin coat

Relinquish not thy meal for me; keep that boat for thyself alone. Avaunt this cave! avaunt the burnt-offerings, which the godless Cyclops offers on Aetna's altars, exulting in meals on strangers' flesh!

Oh! the ruthless monster! to sacrifice his guests at his own hearth, the suppliants of his halls, cleaving and tearing and serving up to his loathsome teeth a feast of human flesh, hot from the coals.

ODYSSEUS (*reappearing with a look of horror*)

O Zeus! what can I say after the hideous sights I have seen inside the cave, things past belief, resembling more the tales men tell than aught they do?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What news, Odysseus? has the Cyclops, most godless monster, been feasting on thy dear comrades?

ODYSSEUS

Aye, he singled out a pair, on whom the flesh was fattest and in best condition, and took them up in his hand to weigh.

LEADER

How went it with you then, poor wretch?

ODYSSEUS

When we had entered yonder rocky abode, he lighted first a fire, throwing logs of towering oak upon his spacious hearth, enough for three wagons to carry as their load, next, close by the blazing flame, he placed his couch of pine-boughs laid upon the floor, and filled a bowl of some ten firkins, pouring white milk thereinto, after he had milked his kine; and by his side he put a can of ivy-wood, whose breadth was three cubits and its depth four maybe; next he set his brazen pot a-boiling on the fire, spits too he set beside him, fashioned of the branches of thorn, their points hardened in the fire and the rest of them trimmed with the hatchet, and the blood-bowls of Aetna for the axe's edge. Now when that hell-cook, god-detested, had everything quite ready, he caught up a pair of my companions and proceeded deliberately to cut the throat of one of them over the yawning brazen pot; but the other he clutched by the tendon of his heel, and, striking him against a sharp point of rocky stone, dashed out his brains, then, after hacking the fleshy parts with glutton cleaver, he set to grilling them, but the limbs he threw into his cauldron to seethe. And I, poor wretch, drew near with streaming eyes and waited on the Cyclops; but the others kept cowering like frightened birds in crannies of the rock, and the blood forsook their skin. Anon, when he had gorged himself upon my comrades' flesh and had fallen on his back, breathing heavily, there came a sudden inspiration to me. I filled a cup of this Maronian wine and offered him a draught, saying, "Cyclops, son of Ocean's god, see here what heavenly drink the grapes of Hellas yield, glad gift of Dionysus." He, glutted with his shameless meal, took and drained it at one draught, and, lifting up his hand, he thanked me thus, "Dearest to me of all my guests! fair the drink thou givest me to crown so fair a feast." Now when I saw his delight, I gave him another cup, knowing the wine would make him rue it, and he would soon be paying the penalty. Then he set to singing; but I kept filling bumper after bumper and heating him with drink. So there he is singing discordantly amid the weeping of my fellow-sailors, and the cave re-echoes; but I have made my way out quietly and would fain save thee and myself, if thou

wilt. Tell me then, is it your wish, or is it not, to fly from this unsocial wretch and take up your abode with Naiad nymphs in the halls of the Bacchic god? Thy father within approves this scheme; but there! he is powerless, getting all he can out of his liquor; his wings are snared by the cup as if he had flown against bird-lime, and he is fuddled; but thou art young and lusty; so save thyself with my help and regain thy old friend Dionysus, so little like the Cyclops.

LEADER

Best of friends, would we might see that day, escaping the godless Cyclops!

ODYSSEUS

Hear then how I will requite this vile monster and rescue you from thraldom.

LEADER

Tell me how; no note of Asiatic lyre would sound more sweetly in our ears than news of the Cyclops' death.

ODYSSEUS

Delighted with this liquor of the Bacchic god, he fain would go a-revelling with his brethren.

LEADER

I understand: thy purpose is to seize and slay him in the thickets when alone, or push him down a precipice.

ODYSSEUS

Not at all; my plan is fraught with subtlety.

LEADER

What then? Truly we have long heard of thy cleverness.

ODYSSEUS

I mean to keep him from this revel, saying he must not give this drink to his brethren but keep it for himself alone and lead a happy life. Then when he falls asleep, o'ermastered by the Bacchic god, I will put a point with this sword of mine to an olive-branch I saw lying in the cave, and will set it on fire; and when I see it well alight, I will lift the heated brand, and, thrusting it full in the Cyclops' eye, melt out his sight with its blaze; and, as when a man in fitting the timbers of a ship makes his auger spin to and fro with a double strap, so will I make the brand revolve in the eye that gives the Cyclops light and will scorch up the pupil thereof.

LEADER

Ho! ho! how glad I feel! wild with joy at the contrivance!

ODYSSEUS

That done, I will embark thee and those thou lovest with old Silenus in the deep hold of my black ship, my ship with double banks of oars, and carry you away from this land.

LEADER

Well, can I too lay hold of the blinding brand, as though the god's libation had been poured? for I would fain have a share in this offering of blood.

ODYSSEUS

Indeed thou *must,* for the brand is large, and thou must help hold it.

LEADER

How lightly would I lift the load of e'en a hundred wains, if that will help us to grub out the eye of the doomed Cyclops, like a wasp's nest.

ODYSSEUS

Hush! for now thou knowest my plot in full, and when I bid you, obey the author of it; for I am not the man to desert my friends inside the cave and save myself alone. And yet I might escape; I am clear of the cavern's depths already, but no! to desert the friends with whom I journeyed hither and only save myself is not a righteous course.

(*He re-enters the cave.*)

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Come, who will be the first and who the next to him upon the list to grip the handle of the brand, and, thrusting it into the Cyclops' eye, gouge out the light thereof?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Hush! hush! Behold the drunkard leaves his rocky home, trolling loud some hideous lay, a clumsy tuneless clown, whom tears await. Come, let us give this boor a lesson in revelry. Ere long will he be blind at any rate.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Happy he who plays the Bacchanal amid the precious streams distilled from grapes, stretched at full length for a revel, his arm around the friend he loves, and some fair dainty damsel on his couch, his hair perfumed with nard and glossy, the while he calls, "Oh! who will ope the door for me?"

(*The* CYCLOPS *enters. He is obviously drunk.*)

CYCLOPS (*singing*)

Ha! ha! full of wine and merry with a feast's good cheer am I, my hold freighted like a merchant-ship up to my belly's very top. This turf graciously invites me to seek my brother Cyclopes for a revel in the spring-tide.

Come, stranger, bring the wine-skin hither and hand it over to me.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Forth from the house its fair lord comes, casting his fair glance round him. We have someone to befriend us. A hostile brand is awaiting thee, no tender bride in dewy grot. No single colour will those garlands have, that soon shall cling so close about thy brow.

ODYSSEUS

(*returning with the wine-skin. He is followed by* SILENUS, *who is also drunk.*)

Hearken, Cyclops; for I am well versed in the ways of Bacchus, whom I have given thee to drink.

CYCLOPS

And who is Bacchus? some reputed god?

ODYSSEUS

The greatest god men know to cheer their life.

CYCLOPS

I like his after-taste at any rate

ODYSSEUS

This is the kind of god he is; he harmeth no man.

CYCLOPS

But how does a god like being housed in a wine-skin?

ODYSSEUS

Put him where one may, he is content there.

CYCLOPS

It is not right that gods should be clad in leather.

ODYSSEUS

What of that, provided he please thee? does the leather hurt thee?

CYCLOPS

I hate the wine-skin, but the liquor we have here I love

ODYSSEUS
Stay, then, Cyclops; drink and be merry.

CYCLOPS
Must I not give my brethren a share in this liquor?

ODYSSEUS
No, keep it thyself and thou wilt appear of more honour.

CYCLOPS
Give it my friends and I shall appear of more use.

ODYSSEUS
Revelling is apt to end in blows, abuse, and strife.

CYCLOPS
I may be drunk, but no man will lay hands on me for all that.

ODYSSEUS
Better stay at home, my friend, after a carouse.

CYCLOPS
Who loves not revelling then is but a simpleton.

ODYSSEUS
But whoso stays at home, when drunk, is wise.

CYCLOPS
What shall we do, Silenus? art minded to stay?

SILENUS
That I am; for what need have we of others to share our drink, Cyclops?

CYCLOPS
Well, truly the turf is soft as down with its fresh flowering plants.

SILENUS (*seating himself*)
Aye, and 'tis pleasant drinking in the warm sunshine. Come, let me see thee stretch thy carcase on the ground.

CYCLOPS (*sitting down*)
There then! Why art thou putting the mixing-bowl behind me?

SILENUS
That no one passing by may upset it.

CYCLOPS

Nay, but thy purpose is to drink upon the sly; set it between us. (*To* ODYSSEUS) Now tell me, stranger, by what name to call thee.

(SILENUS *is drinking steadily and stealthily.*)

ODYSSEUS

Noman. What boon shall I receive of thee to earn my thanks?

CYCLOPS

I will feast on thee last, after all thy comrades.

ODYSSEUS

Fair indeed the honour thou bestowest on thy guest, sir Cyclops!

CYCLOPS (*turning suddenly to* SILENUS)

Ho, sirrah! what art thou about? taking a stealthy pull at the wine?

SILENUS

No, but it kissed me for my good looks.

CYCLOPS

Thou shalt smart, if thou kiss the wine when it kisses not thee.

SILENUS

Oh! but it did, for it says it is in love with my handsome face.

CYCLOPS (*holding out his cup*)

Pour in; only give me my cup full.

SILENUS

H'm! how is it mixed? just let me make sure.

(*Takes another pull.*)

CYCLOPS

Perdition! give it me at once.

SILENUS

Oh, no! I really cannot, till I see thee with a crown on, and have another taste myself.

CYCLOPS

My cup-bearer is a cheat.

SILENUS

No really, but the wine is so luscious. Thou must wipe thy lips, though, to get a draught.

CYCLOPS

There! my lips and beard are clean now.

SILENUS

Bend thine elbow gracefully, and then quaff thy cup, as thou seest me do, and as now thou seest me not. (*Burying his face in his cup*)

CYCLOPS

Aha! what next?

SILENUS

I drunk it off at a draught with much pleasure.

CYCLOPS

Stranger, take the skin thyself and be my cup-bearer.

ODYSSEUS

Well, at any rate the grape is no stranger to my hand.

CYCLOPS

Come, pour it in.

ODYSSEUS

In it goes! keep silence, that is all.

CYCLOPS

A difficult task when a man is deep in his cups.

ODYSSEUS

Here, take and drink it off, leave none. Thou must be silent and only give in when the liquor does.

CYCLOPS

God wot! it is a clever stock that bears the grape.

ODYSSEUS

Aye, and if thou but swallow plenty of it after a plentiful meal, moistening thy belly till its thirst is gone, it will throw thee into slumber; but if thou leave aught behind, the Bacchic god will parch thee for it.

CYCLOPS

Ha! ha! what a trouble it was getting out! This is pleasure unalloyed; earth and sky seem whirling round together; I see the throne of Zeus and all the godhead's majesty. Kiss *thee!* no! There are the Graces trying to tempt me. I shall rest well enough with my Ganymede here; yea, by the Graces, right fairly; for I like lads better than the wenches.

SILENUS

What! Cyclops, am I Ganymede, Zeus's minion?

CYCLOPS (*attempting to carry him into the cave*)

To be sure, Ganymede whom I am carrying off from the halls of Dardanus.

SILENUS

I am undone, my children; outrageous treatment waits me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Dost find fault with thy lover? dost scorn him in his cups?

SILENUS

Woe is me! most bitter shall I find the wine ere long.

(SILENUS *is dragged into the cave by the* CYCLOPS.)

ODYSSEUS

Up now, children of Dionysus, sons of a noble sire, soon will yon creature in the cave, relaxed in slumber as ye see him, spew from his shameless maw the meat. Already the brand inside his lair is vomiting a cloud of smoke; and the only reason we prepared it was to burn the Cyclops' eye; so mind thou quit thee like a man.

LEADER

I will have a spirit as of rock or adamant; but go inside, before my father suffers any shameful treatment; for here thou hast things ready.

ODYSSEUS

O Hephaestus, lord of Aetna, rid thyself for once and all of a troublesome neighbour by burning his bright eye out. Come, Sleep, as well, offspring of sable Night, come with all thy power on the monster god-detested; and never after Troy's most glorious toils destroy Odysseus and his crew by the hands of one who recketh naught of God or man; else must we reckon Chance a goddess, and Heaven's will inferior to hers.

(ODYSSEUS *re-enters the cave.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Tightly the pincers shall grip the neck of him who feasts upon his guests; for soon will he lose the light of his eye by fire; already the brand, a tree's huge limb, lurks amid the embers charred.

Oh! come ye then and work his doom, pluck out the maddened Cyclops' eye, that he may rue his drinking. And I too fain would leave the Cyclops' lonely land and see king Bromius, ivy-crowned, the god I sorely miss. Ah! shall I ever come to that?

ODYSSEUS (*leaving the cave cautiously*)

Silence, ye cattle! I adjure you; close your lips; make not a sound! I'll not let a man of you so much as breathe or wink or clear his throat, that yon pest awake not, until the sight in the Cyclops' eye has passed through the fiery ordeal.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Silent we stand with bated breath.

ODYSSEUS

In then, and mind your fingers grip the brand, for it is splendidly red-hot.

LEADER

Thyself ordain who first must seize the blazing bar and burn the Cyclops' eye out, that we may share alike whate'er betides.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Standing where I am before the door, I am too far off to thrust the fire into his eye.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

I have just gone lame

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Why, then, thou art in the same plight as I; for somehow or other I sprained my ankle, standing still

ODYSSEUS

Sprained thy ankle, standing still?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Yes, and my eyes are full of dust or ashes from somewhere or other.

ODYSSEUS

These are sorry fellows, worthless as allies.

LEADER

Because I feel for my back and spine, and express no wish to have my teeth knocked out, I am a coward, am I? Well, but I know a spell of Orpheus, a most excellent one, to make the brand enter his skull of its own accord, and set alight the one-eyed son of Earth.

ODYSSEUS

Long since I knew thou wert by nature such an one, and now I know it better; I must employ my own friends; but, though thou bring no active

aid, cheer us on at any rate, that I may find my friends emboldened by thy encouragement.

(ODYSSEUS *goes back into the cave.*)

LEADER

That will I do; the Carian [2] shall run the risk for us; and as far as encouragement goes, let the Cyclops smoulder.

CHORUS (*singing*)

What ho! my gallants, thrust away, make haste and burn his eyebrow off, the monster's guest-devouring. Oh! singe and scorch the shepherd of Aetna; twirl the brand and drag it round and be careful lest in his agony he treat thee to some wantonness.

CYCLOPS (*bellowing in the cave*)

Oh! oh! my once bright eye is burnt to cinders now.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Sweet indeed the triumph-song; pray sing it to us, Cyclops.

CYCLOPS (*from within*)

Oh! oh! once more; what outrage on me and what ruin! But never shall ye escape this rocky cave unpunished, ye worthless creatures; for I will stand in the entrance of the cleft and fit my hands into it thus. (*Staggering to the entrance*)

LEADER

Why dost thou cry out, Cyclops?

CYCLOPS

I am undone.

LEADER

Thou art indeed a sorry sight.

CYCLOPS

Aye, and a sad one, too.

LEADER

Didst fall among the coals in a drunken fit?

CYCLOPS

Noman has undone me.

LEADER

Then there is no one hurting thee after all.

CYCLOPS

Noman is blinding me.

LEADER

Then art thou not blind.

CYCLOPS

As blind as thou, forsooth.

LEADER

How, pray, could no man have made thee blind?

CYCLOPS

Thou mockest me; but where is this Noman?

LEADER

Nowhere, Cyclops.

CYCLOPS

It was the stranger, vile wretch! who proved my ruin, that thou mayst understand rightly, by swilling me with the liquor he gave me.

LEADER

Ah! wine is a terrible foe, hard to wrestle with.

CYCLOPS

Tell me, I adjure thee, have they escaped or are they still within?

(*During the following lines,* ODYSSEUS *and his men slip by the* CYCLOPS, *despite his efforts to stop them.*)

LEADER

Here they are ranged in silence, taking the rock to screen them.

CYCLOPS

On which side?

LEADER

On thy right.

CYCLOPS

Where?

LEADER

Close against the rock. Hast caught them?

CYCLOPS

Trouble on trouble! I have run my skull against the rock and cracked it.

LEADER

Aye, and they are escaping thee.

CYCLOPS

This way, was it not? 'Twas this way thou saidst.

LEADER

No, not this way.

CYCLOPS

Which then?

LEADER

They are getting round thee on the left.

CYCLOPS

Alas! I am being mocked, ye jeer me in my evil plight.

LEADER

They are no longer there; but facing thee that stranger stands.

CYCLOPS

Master of villainy, where, oh! where art thou?

ODYSSEUS

Some way from thee I am keeping careful guard over the person of Odysseus.

CYCLOPS

What, a new name! hast changed thine?

ODYSSEUS

Yes, Odysseus, the name my father gave me. But thou wert doomed to pay for thy unholy feast; for I should have seen Troy burned to but sorry purpose, unless I had avenged on thee the slaughter of my comrades.

CYCLOPS

Woe is me! 'tis an old oracle coming true; yes, it said I should have my eye put out by thee on thy way home from Troy; but it likewise foretold that thou wouldst surely pay for this, tossing on the sea for many a day.

ODYSSEUS

Go hang! E'en as I say, so have I done. And now will I get me to the beach and start my hollow ship across the sea of Sicily to the land of my fathers.

CYCLOPS

Thou shalt not; I will break a boulder off this rock and crush thee, crew and all, beneath my throw. Blind though I be, I will climb the hill, mounting through yonder tunnel.

LEADER

As for us, henceforth will we be the servants of Bacchus, sharing the voyage of this hero Odysseus.

COLERIDGE's translation has been modified in the following lines: 169–171, 546, and 584.

1. Reference to Odysseus as the son of Sisyphus is for the purpose of casting a slur upon him. Cf. the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, note 2.

2. Coleridge's note here in part runs: "*i.e.*, to let some one, whose life is less valuable, run the risk instead of doing so oneself. The Carians, being the earliest mercenaries, were commonly selected for any very dangerous enterprise, and so this proverb arose."

THE PLAYS OF ARISTOPHANES

I

THE ACHARNIANS

Characters in the Play

Dicaeopolis
Herald
Amphitheus
Ambassadors
Pseudartabas
Theorus
Daughter of Dicaeopolis
Slave of Euripides
Euripides
Lamachus
A Megarian
Two Young Girls, *daughters of the Megarian*
An Informer
A Boeotian
Nicarchus
Slave of Lamachus
A Husbandman
A Wedding Guest
Chorus of Acharnian Charcoal Burners

INTRODUCTION

PRODUCED at the Lenaean festival in 425 under the pseudonym of Callistratus, *The Acharnians* is the earliest comedy of Aristophanes that we possess and the third which we know him to have written. In competition with productions of the older and famous Eupolis and Cratinus the work of the youngster was awarded the highest prize, and this was doubtless the first victory of his career. The play is remarkable less for the skill with which it is constructed or for the essential humour of the plot itself, than for the variety of its incidents and the brilliance of their treatment. Clearly political, rather than social or literary, in its theme, it constitutes, with *Peace* and *Lysistrata*, a triad of political plays that have as their underlying purpose the urging of a truce on the Athenian populace.

When the play opens, we are presented with Dicaeopolis, that model of what Aristophanes thought a "good citizen" ought to be, sitting alone in the Pnyx, waiting for the arrival of a characteristically belated Athenian Assembly and musing on the many misfortunes and few joys which have been his since the beginning of the war. The Assembly finally convenes, with Dicaeopolis firmly resolved to let nothing stand in the way of concluding a truce with the Peloponnesians, but he is quickly and bitterly disappointed when the wretched Amphitheus is silenced after proposing just such a measure. Driven to desperation by the absurd reports and spurious specimens of the wonders of Persia presented by the newly returned embassy, the "good citizen" commissions Amphitheus to negotiate with Sparta a private truce for him and his family.

While he is impatiently awaiting the return of his envoy he is forced to listen to another ambassadorial report, this time concerning the Thracian Sitalces, and to witness the wretched samples of northern soldiery proudly introduced as the "host of the Odomanti." Affecting to have felt a drop of rain, he announces it as an omen, and on this preposterous pretext the magistrates adjourn the grateful Assembly. At this juncture Amphitheus returns, hotly pursued by the Elders of Acharnae; his youthful vigour, however, has enabled him to outdistance his followers sufficiently to give Dicaeopolis an opportunity to taste and to test the sample

truces that Sparta is willing to offer, and furthermore to select and to ratify that of thirty years' duration as the most delectable and desirable.

As soon as he has entered his house to prepare for the celebration of the rural Dionysia and Amphitheus has fled, never to return, the Chorus of Acharnian Elders enters, fiercely searching for the man who has had the impudence and the temerity to conclude a truce with Sparta. Soon Dicaeopolis emerges from his dwelling, followed by his family, and the phallic procession is organized and commenced. The Acharnians, perceiving that this is the man they are looking for, set upon him and are on the point of stoning him, when he exhibits the characteristic resourcefulness of an Aristophanic hero, rushes into the house, and a moment later returns with a basket of charcoal. Using this "fellow-citizen" of the Acharnians as a hostage, he persuades or coerces them into letting him plead his case with his head on a block.

Realizing that it is pity above all that he must arouse, and distrustful of his own oratorical talents, he resolves to go to Euripides, whose house, with comic convenience, is juxtaposed to his, and to borrow the theatrical costume of the most miserable of the many wretched heroes which that eminently pathetic tragedian has introduced on the stage. Dicaeopolis succeeds in obtaining almost everything he needs from the exasperated poet, who feels that the foundations of his art are thus being undermined; "Miserable man! you are stealing a whole tragedy," he exclaims. Dicaeopolis, now garbed in the most pitiable manner possible, returns to the Acharnians, lays his head on the block, and delivers a sound and telling speech in favour of the Spartans.

The effect is to divide the Chorus; half of them are won over, half stubbornly unaffected, and a scuffle ensues. The leader of the die-hards calls for assistance on the belligerent Lamachus, whom the demands of the play have forced to dwell next to Euripides and but two doors from the pacificistic Dicaeopolis. The doughty general immediately sallies forth, fully and resplendently panoplied, but the subtle arguments of the "good citizen" are too much for him, and he returns to his house in evident discomfiture. Dicaeopolis now proclaims the cessation of all war-time boycotts so far as he is concerned, and enters his house, leaving the stage to the Chorus, which delivers the parabasis.

The anapests contain a recital of the services which the poet claims to have rendered to his native city, chief amongst them being the caution against the deceptive flattery of foreigners. The ode celebrates the Muse of Acharnae in lyric and fiery language whose metaphors, like so many others in this comedy, are derived from charcoal-burning. The epirrheme pleads the case of Acharnae and particularly that of the old against the young. The antode and the antepirrheme extend and elaborate this motif.

At the conclusion of the parabasis, Dicaeopolis comes out of his house

and defines his market-place. Immediately a Megarian enters and vividly portrays, as much in his own wretched person as by the reports which he gives of conditions at home, the distress caused by Pericles' famous and fulminous decree. The Megarian is succeeded by a Boeotian, who is effectively contrasted with his predecessor; sleek and fat, possessing good victuals in abundance, he is perhaps meant to indicate what Megara might have had if the fatal boycott had not been applied. As soon as Dicaeopolis and the Boeotian have come to the conclusion that the only Athenian product not found in Boeotia is informers, Nicarchus, an eminent representative of that despicable profession, appears; he is forthwith seized and packed in hay, like a vase, and carried off by the Boeotian. A slave belonging to Lamachus approaches and seeks to purchase the Copaic eel, but Dicaeopolis refuses to sell him one, thus fulfilling to the last detail the proclamation made before the parabasis, to the effect that his market is to be open to the Megarians and to the Boeotians but closed to Lamachus.

A herald appears and announces the Anthesterian feast, and Dicaeopolis sets his slaves to work preparing the fine foods which he can now enjoy. While this pleasant exercise is occupying the "good citizen" another herald arrives and proclaims to Lamachus that the generals have ordered him to set forth on an expedition immediately. The ensuing scene, in which Dicaeopolis is gaily preparing for the feast and Lamachus gloomily getting ready for the campaign, is one of the best in the play, and the poet makes full use of the opportunities which this sharp and suggestive contrast offers. Finally both worthies depart in opposite directions amid the impartial felicitations of the Chorus. In the final scene both Lamachus and Dicaeopolis return almost simultaneously from their respective activities, the former having been badly wounded in a ridiculous adventure, the latter magnificently inebriated and amusing each hand with a different girl. The comedy ends with a varied lyric passage in which the pained and woeful groans of the general alternate with the triumphant and amorous shouts of the pacifist.

It has been sagely observed that if we had the misfortune to possess but a single comedy of Aristophanes, we should be least afflicted if the sole representative of his art were *The Acharnians,* and indeed this composition acquaints us with a comfortable majority of his talents and nearly all of the objects of his scorn. Many of the later comedies are more abundantly endowed with artistic unity and comic intensity, but there is little of importance in them which is not clearly, if briefly, foreshadowed in *The Acharnians.* Almost as if he were writing a dramatic introduction to all his works and a general analysis of his own heart, the son of Philippus dilates our eyes and delights our minds with a gaudy and compendious succession of scenes in which the tragic follies of the war-

party, the lugubrious fopperies of Euripides, the proud gullibility of the Athenians, and the careless inhumanity of their foreign policy are equally and effectively lampooned.

A further uniqueness of *The Acharnians* is discernible in the fact that of all his heroes none is so dear to Aristophanes as Dicaeopolis, and nowhere else has the poet elected to fill the mouth of an individual with sentiments so clearly his own; the "good citizen" even speaks of himself as having written comedies! Amongst the eleven comedies that have come down to us, there are several which are evidently better than *The Acharnians;* there is none which is so comprehensively Aristophanic.

THE ACHARNIANS

(SCENE:—*The Orchestra represents the Pnyx at Athens; in the background are the usual houses, this time three in number, belonging to Dicaeopolis, Euripides, and Lamachus respectively.*)

DICAEOPOLIS (*alone*)

WHAT cares have not gnawed at my heart and how few have been the pleasures in my life! Four, to be exact, while my troubles have been as countless as the grains of sand on the shore! Let me see! of what value to me have been these few pleasures? Ah! I remember that I was delighted in soul when Cleon had to cough up those five talents; I was in ecstasy and I love the Knights for this deed; "it is an honour to Greece." But the day when I was impatiently awaiting a piece by Æschylus,[1] what tragic despair it caused me when the herald called, "Theognis, introduce your Chorus!" Just imagine how this blow struck straight at my heart! On the other hand, what joy Dexitheus caused me at the musical competition, when right after Moschus he played a Boeotian melody on the lyre! But this year by contrast! Oh! what deadly torture to hear Chaeris perform the prelude in the Orthian mode!—Never, however, since I began to bathe, has the dust hurt my eyes as it does to-day. Still it is the day of assembly; all should be here at daybreak, and yet the Pnyx is still deserted. They are gossiping in the market-place, slipping hither and thither to avoid the vermilioned rope.[2] The Prytanes even do not come; they will be late, but when they come they will push and fight each other for a seat in the front row. They will never trouble themselves with the question of peace. Oh! Athens! Athens! As for myself, I do not fail to come here before all the rest, and now, finding myself alone, I groan, yawn, stretch, fart, and know not what to do; I make sketches in the dust, pull out my loose hairs, muse, think of my fields, long for peace, curse town life and regret my dear country home, which never told me to "buy fuel, vinegar or oil": there the word "buy," which cuts me in two, was unknown; I harvested everything at will. Therefore I have come to the assembly fully prepared to bawl, interrupt and abuse the speakers, if they

talk of anything but peace. (*The Orchestra begins to fill with people.*) But here come the Prytanes, and high time too, for it is midday! There, just as I said, they are pushing and fighting for the front seats.

HERALD (*officiously*)

Step forward, step forward, get within the consecrated area.

AMPHITHEUS (*rising*)

Has anyone spoken yet?

HERALD

Who asks to speak?

AMPHITHEUS

I do.

HERALD

Your name?

AMPHITHEUS

Amphitheus.

HERALD

Are you not a man?

AMPHITHEUS

No! I am an immortal! Amphitheus was the son of Ceres and Triptolemus; of him was born Celeus, Celeus wedded Phaenereté, my grandmother, whose son was Lycinus, and, being born of him I am an immortal; it is to me alone that the gods have entrusted the duty of treating with the Lacedaemonians. But, citizens, though I am immortal, I am dying of hunger; the Prytanes give me nothing.

HERALD (*calling*)

Officers!

AMPHITHEUS (*as the Scythian policemen seize him*)

Oh, Triptolemus and Celeus, do ye thus forsake your own blood?

DICAEOPOLIS (*rising*)

Prytanes, in expelling this citizen, you are offering an outrage to the Assembly. He only desired to secure peace for us and to sheathe the sword.

(*The Scythians release Amphitheus.*)

HERALD

Sit down! Silence!

DICAEOPOLIS

No, by Apollo, I will not, unless you are going to discuss the question of peace.

HERALD (*ignoring this; loudly*)

The ambassadors, who are returned from the Court of the King!

DICAEOPOLIS

Of what King? I am sick of all those fine birds, the peacock ambassadors and their swagger.

HERALD

Silence!

DICAEOPOLIS (*as he perceives the entering ambassadors dressed in the Persian mode*)

Oh! oh! By Ecbatana, what a costume!

AMBASSADOR (*pompously*)

During the archonship of Euthymenes, you sent us to the Great King on a salary of two drachmae per diem

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

Ah! those poor drachmae!

AMBASSADOR

We suffered horribly on the plains of the Cayster, sleeping under a tent, stretched deliciously on fine chariots, half dead with weariness.

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

And I was very much at ease, lying on the straw along the battlements!

AMBASSADOR

Everywhere we were well received and forced to drink delicious wine out of golden or crystal flagons. . . .

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

Oh, city of Cranaus, thy ambassadors are laughing at thee!

AMBASSADOR

For great feeders and heavy drinkers are alone esteemed as men by the barbarians.

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

Just as here in Athens, we only esteem the wenchers and pederasts.

AMBASSADOR

At the end of the fourth year we reached the King's Court, but he had left with his whole army to take a crap, and for the space of eight months he was thus sitting on the can in the midst of the golden mountains.

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

And how long did it take him to close his arse? A month?

AMBASSADOR

After this he returned to his palace; then he entertained us and had us served with oxen roasted whole in an oven.

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

Who ever saw an ox roasted in an oven? What a lie!

AMBASSADOR

And one day, by Zeus, he also had us served with a bird three times as large as Cleonymus, and called the Hoax.

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

And do we give you two drachmæ, that you should hoax us thus?

AMBASSADOR

We are bringing to you Pseudartabas, the King's Eye.

DICAEOPOLIS

I would a crow might pluck out yours with his beak, you cursed ambassador!

HERALD (*loudly*)

The King's Eye!

(*Enter* PSEUDARTABAS, *in Persian costume; his mask is one great eye; he is accompanied by two eunuchs*)

DICAEOPOLIS (*as he sees him*)

Good God! Friend, with your great eye, round like the hole through which the oarsman passes his sweep, you have the air of a galley doubling a cape to gain port.

AMBASSADOR

Come, Pseudartabas, give forth the message for the Athenians with which you were charged by the Great King.

PSEUDARTABAS

I ártamáne Xárxas ápiaóna satrá.[3]

AMBASSADOR (*to* DICAEOPOLIS)

Do you understand what he says?

DICAEOPOLIS

God, no!

AMBASSADOR (*to the* PRYTANES)

He says that the Great King will send you gold (*to* PSEUDARTABAS) Come, utter the word 'gold' louder and more distinctly.

PSEUDARTABAS

Thou shalt not have gold, thou gaping-arsed Ionian.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! God help us, but *that's* clear enough!

AMBASSADOR

What does he say?

DICAEOPOLIS

That the Ionians are gaping-arsed, if they expect to receive gold from the barbarians.

AMBASSADOR

Not so, he speaks of bushels of gold.

DICAEOPOLIS

What bushels? You're nothing but a wind-bag; get out of the way; I will find out the truth by myself. (*to* PSEUDARTABAS) Come now, answer me clearly, if you do not wish me to dye your skin red. Will the Great King send us gold? (PSEUDARTABAS *makes a negative sign.*) Then our ambassadors are seeking to deceive us? (PSEUDARTABAS *signs affirmatively.*) These fellows make signs like any Greek; I am sure that they are nothing but Athenians. Oh! ho! I recognize one of these eunuchs; it is Clisthenes, the son of Sibyrtius. Behold the effrontery of this shaven and provocative arse! How, you big baboon, with such a beard do you seek to play the eunuch to us? And this other one? Is it not Straton?

HERALD

Silence! Sit down! The Senate invites the King's Eye to the Prytaneum.

(*The* AMBASSADORS *and* PSEUDARTABAS *depart.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

Is this not sufficient to drive a man to hang himself? Here I stand chilled to the bone, whilst the doors of the Prytaneum fly wide open to lodge such rascals. But I will do something great and bold. Where is Amphitheus? Come and speak with me.

AMPHITHEUS

Here I am.

DICAEOPOLIS

Take these eight drachmae and go and conclude a truce with the Lacedæmonians for me, my wife and my children; I leave you free, my dear Prytanes, to send out embassies and to stand gaping in the air.

(AMPHITHEUS *rushes out.*)

HERALD

Bring in Theorus, who has returned from the Court of Sitalces.

THEORUS (*rising; he wears a Thracian costume*)

I am here.

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

Another humbug!

THEORUS

We should not have remained long in Thrace . . .

DICAEOPOLIS

. . . if you had not been well paid.

THEORUS

. . . if the country had not been covered with snow; the rivers were ice-bound . . .

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

That was when Theognis produced his tragedy.

THEORUS

. . . during the whole of that time I was holding my own with Sitalces, cup in hand; and, in truth, he adored you to such a degree that he wrote on the walls, "How beautiful are the Athenians!" His son, to whom we gave the freedom of the city, burned with desire to come here and eat sausages at the feast of the Apaturia; he prayed his father to come to the aid of his new country and Sitalces swore on his goblet that he would succour us with such a host that the Athenians would exclaim, "What a cloud of grasshoppers!"

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

Damned if I believe a word of what you tell us! Excepting the grasshoppers, there is not a grain of truth in it all!

THEORUS

And he has sent you the most warlike soldiers of all Thrace.

DICAEOPOLIS (*aside*)

Now we shall begin to see clearly.

HERALD

Come hither, Thracians, whom Theorus brought.

(*A few Thracians are ushered in; they have a most unwarlike appearance; the most striking feature of their costume is the circumcised phallus.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

What plague have we here?

THEORUS

The host of the Odomanti.

DICAEOPOLIS

Of the Odomanti? Tell me what it means. Who sliced their tools like that?

THEORUS

If they are given a wage of two drachmae, they will put all Boeotia to fire and sword.

DICAEOPOLIS

Two drachmae to those circumcised hounds! Groan aloud, ye people of rowers, bulwark of Athens! (*The Odomanti steal his sack*) Ah! great gods! I am undone; these Odomanti are robbing me of my garlic! Give me back my garlic.

THEORUS

Oh! wretched man! do not go near them; they have eaten garlic.

DICAEOPOLIS

Prytanes, will you let me be treated in this manner, in my own country and by barbarians? But I oppose the discussion of paying a wage to the Thracians; I announce an omen; I have just felt a drop of rain.[1]

HERALD

Let the Thracians withdraw and return the day after tomorrow, the Prytanes declare the sitting at an end.

(*All leave except* DICAEOPOLIS.)

DICAEOPOLIS

Ye gods, what garlic I have lost! But here comes Amphitheus returned from Lacedaemon. Welcome, Amphitheus.

(AMPHITHEUS *enters, very much out of breath.*)

AMPHITHEUS

No, there is no welcome for me and I fly as fast as I can, for I am pursued by the Acharnians.

DICAEOPOLIS

Why, what has happened?

AMPHITHEUS

I was hurrying to bring your treaty of truce, but some old dotards from Acharnae got scent of the thing; they are veterans of Marathon, tough as oak or maple, of which they are made for sure—rough and ruthless. They all started shouting: "Wretch! you are the bearer of a treaty, and the enemy has only just cut our vines!" Meanwhile they were gathering stones in their cloaks, so I fled and they ran after me shouting.

DICAEOPOLIS

Let 'em shout as much as they please! But have you brought me a treaty?

AMPHITHEUS

Most certainly, here are three samples to select from, this one is five years old; taste it.

(*He hands* DICAEOPOLIS *a bottle.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

Faugh!

AMPHITHEUS

What's the matter?

DICAEOPOLIS

I don't like it; it smells of pitch and of the ships they are fitting out.

AMPHITHEUS (*handing him another bottle*)

Here is another, ten years old; taste it.

DICAEOPOLIS

It smells strongly of the delegates, who go around the towns to chide the allies for their slowness.[5]

AMPHITHEUS (*handing him a third bottle*)

This last is a truce of thirty years, both on sea and land.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh! by Bacchus! what a bouquet! It has the aroma of nectar and ambrosia; this does not say to us, "Provision yourselves for three days." But it lisps the gentle numbers, "Go whither you will." I accept it, ratify it,

drink it at one draught and consign the Acharnians to limbo. Freed from the war and its ills, I shall celebrate the rural Dionysia.

AMPHITHEUS

And I shall run away, for I'm mortally afraid of the Acharnians.

(AMPHITHEUS *runs off.* DICAEOPOLIS *goes into his house, carrying his truce. The* CHORUS OF ACHARNIAN CHARCOAL BURNERS *enters, in great haste and excitement.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This way all! Let us follow our man; we will demand him of everyone we meet; the public weal makes his seizure imperative. Ho, there! tell me which way the bearer of the truce has gone.

CHORUS (*singing*)

He has escaped us, he has disappeared. Damn old age! When I was young, in the days when I followed Phayllus, running with a sack of coals on my back, this wretch would not have eluded my pursuit, let him be as swift as he will.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But now my limbs are stiff; old Lacratides feels his legs are weighty and the traitor escapes me. No, no, let us follow him; old Acharnians like ourselves shall not be set at naught by a scoundrel . . .

CHORUS (*singing*)

. . . who has dared, by Zeus, to conclude a truce when I wanted the war continued with double fury in order to avenge my ruined lands. No mercy for our foes until I have pierced their hearts like a sharp reed, so that they dare never again ravage my vineyards.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, let us seek the rascal; let us look everywhere, carrying our stones in our hands; let us hunt him from place to place until we trap him; I could never, never tire of the delight of stoning him.

DICAEOPOLIS (*from within*)

Peace! profane men!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Silence all! Friends, do you hear the sacred formula? Here is he, whom we seek! This way, all! Get out of his way, surely he comes to offer an oblation.

(*The* CHORUS *withdraws to one side.*)

DICAEOPOLIS (*comes out with a pot in his hand; he is followed by*

his wife, his daughter, who carries a basket, and two slaves, who carry the phallus.)

Peace, profane men! Let the basket-bearer come forward, and thou, Xanthias, hold the phallus well upright. Daughter, set down the basket and let us begin the sacrifice.

DAUGHTER OF DICAEOPOLIS (*putting down the basket and taking out the sacred cake*)

Mother, hand me the ladle, that I may spread the sauce on the cake

DICAEOPOLIS

It is well! Oh, mighty Bacchus, it is with joy that, freed from military duty, I and all mine perform this solemn rite and offer thee this sacrifice; grant that I may keep the rural Dionysia without hindrance and that this truce of thirty years may be propitious for me. Come, my child, carry the basket gracefully and with a grave, demure face. Happy he who shall be your possessor and embrace you so firmly at dawn, that you fart like a weasel. Go forward, and have a care they don't snatch your jewels in the crowd. Xanthias, walk behind the basket-bearer and hold the phallus well erect; I will follow, singing the Phallic hymn; thou, wife, look on from the top of the terrace. Forward!

(*He sings*)

Oh, Phalés, companion of the orgies of Bacchus, night reveller, god of adultery and of pederasty, these past six years I have not been able to invoke thee. With what joy I return to my farmstead, thanks to the truce I have concluded, freed from cares, from fighting and from Lamachuses! How much sweeter, oh Phalés, Phalés, is it to surprise Thratta, the pretty woodmaid, Strymodorus' slave, stealing wood from Mount Phelleus, to catch her under the arms, to throw her on the ground and lay her, Oh, Phalés, Phalés! If thou wilt drink and bemuse thyself with me, we shall to-morrow consume some good dish in honour of the peace, and I will hang up my buckler over the smoking hearth.

(*The procession reaches the place where the* CHORUS *is hiding.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

That's the man himself. Stone him, stone him, stone him, strike the wretch. All, all of you, pelt him, pelt him!

DICAEOPOLIS (*using his pot for a shield*)

What is this? By Heracles, you will smash my pot.

(*The daughter and the two slaves retreat.*)

CHORUS (*singing excitedly*)

It is you that we are stoning, you miserable scoundrel.

DICAEOPOLIS

And for what sin, Acharnian elders, tell me that!

CHORUS (*singing, with greater excitement*)

You ask that, you impudent rascal, traitor to your country; you alone amongst us all have concluded a truce, and you dare to look us in the face!

DICAEOPOLIS

But you do not know *why* I have treated for peace. Listen!

CHORUS (*singing fiercely*)

Listen to you? No, no, you are about to die, we will annihilate you with our stones.

DICAEOPOLIS

But first of all, listen. Stop, my friends.

CHORUS (*singing; with intense hatred*)

I will hear nothing; do not address me; I hate you more than I do Cleon, whom one day I shall flay to make sandals for the Knights. Listen to your long speeches, after you have treated with the Laconians? No, I will punish you.

DICAEOPOLIS

Friends, leave the Laconians out of debate and consider only whether I have not done well to conclude my truce.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Done well! when you have treated with a people who know neither gods, nor truth, nor faith.

DICAEOPOLIS

We attribute too much to the Laconians; as for myself, I know that they are not the cause of all our troubles.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh, indeed, rascal! You dare to use such language to me and then expect me to spare you!

DICAEOPOLIS

No, no, they are not the cause of all our troubles, and I who address you claim to be able to prove that they have much to complain of in us.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This passes endurance; my heart bounds with fury. Thus you dare to defend our enemies.

DICAEOPOLIS

Were my head on the block I would uphold what I say and rely on the approval of the people.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Comrades, let us hurl our stones and dye this fellow purple.

DICAEOPOLIS

What black fire-brand has inflamed your heart! You will not hear me? You really will not, Acharnians?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No, a thousand times, no.

DICAEOPOLIS

This is a hateful injustice.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

May I die if I listen.

DICAEOPOLIS

Nay, nay! have mercy, have mercy, Acharnians.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You shall die.

DICAEOPOLIS

Well, blood for blood! I will kill your dearest friend. I have here the hostages of Acharnae; I shall disembowel them.

(*He goes into the house.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Acharnians, what means this threat? Has he got one of our children in his house? What gives him such audacity?

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out again*)

Stone me, if it please you; I shall avenge myself on this. (*He shows them a basket.*) Let us see whether you have any love for your coals.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Great Gods! this basket is our fellow-citizen. Stop, stop, in heaven's name!

DICAEOPOLIS

I shall dismember it despite your cries; I will listen to nothing.

CHORUS (*singing; tragically*)

How, will you kill this coal-basket, my beloved comrade?

DICAEOPOLIS

Just now you would not listen to me.

CHORUS (*singing; plaintively*)

Well, speak now, if you will; tell us, tell us you have a weakness for the Lacedaemonians. I consent to anything; never will I forsake this dear little basket.

DICAEOPOLIS

First, throw down your stones.

CHORUS (*singing; meekly*)

There! it's done. And you put away your sword.

DICAEOPOLIS

Let me see that no stones remain concealed in your cloaks.

CHORUS (*singing; petulantly*)

They are all on the ground; see how we shake our garments. Come, no haggling, lay down your sword; we threw away everything while crossing from one side of the Orchestra to the other.

DICAEOPOLIS

What cries of anguish you would have uttered had these coals of Parnes been dismembered, and yet it came very near it; had they perished, their death would have been due to the folly of their fellow-citizens. The poor basket was so frightened, look, it has shed a thick black dust over me, the same as a cuttle-fish does. What an irritable temper! You shout and throw stones, you will not hear my arguments—not even when I propose to speak in favour of the Lacedaemonians with my head on the block; and yet I cling to life.

(*He goes into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing; belligerently again*)

Well then, bring out a block before your door, scoundrel, and let us hear the good grounds you can give us; I am curious to know them. Now mind, as you proposed yourself, place your head on the block and speak.

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out of his house, carrying a block*)

Here is the block; and, though I am but a very sorry speaker, I wish nevertheless to talk freely of the Lacedaemonians and without the protection of my buckler. Yet I have many reasons for fear. I know our rus-

tics; they are delighted if some braggart comes, and rightly or wrongly, loads both them and their city with praise and flattery; they do not see that such toad-eaters are traitors, who sell them for gain. As for the old men, I know their weakness; they only seek to overwhelm the accused with their votes. Nor have I forgotten how Cleon treated me because of my comedy last year; he dragged me before the Senate and there he uttered endless slanders against me; it was a tempest of abuse, a deluge of lies. Through what a slough of mud he dragged me! I almost perished. Permit me, therefore, before I speak, to dress in the manner most likely to draw pity.

CHORUS (*singing; querulously*)

What evasions, subterfuges and delays! Wait! here is the sombre helmet of Pluto with its thick bristling plume; Hieronymus lends it to you; then open Sisyphus' bag of wiles; but hurry, hurry, for our discussion does not admit of delay.

DICAEOPOLIS

The time has come for me to manifest my courage, so I will go and seek Euripides. (*Knocking on* EURIPIDES' *door*) Ho! slave, slave!

SLAVE (*opening the door and poking his head out*)

Who's there?

DICAEOPOLIS

Is Euripides at home?

SLAVE

He is and he isn't; understand that, if you can.

DICAEOPOLIS

What's that? He is and he *isn't!*

SLAVE

Certainly, old man; busy gathering subtle fancies here and there, his mind is not in the house, but he himself is; perched aloft, he is composing a tragedy.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, Euripides, you are indeed happy to have a slave so quick at repartee! Now, fellow, call your master.

SLAVE

Impossible! (*He slams the door.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

Too bad. But I will not give up. Come, let us knock at the door again. Euripides, my little Euripides, my darling Euripides, listen; never had man greater right to your pity. It is Dicaeopolis of the Chollidan Deme who calls you. Do you hear?

EURIPIDES (*from within*)

I have no time to waste.

DICAEOPOLIS

Very well, have yourself wheeled out here.

EURIPIDES

Impossible.

DICAEOPOLIS

Nevertheless . . .

EURIPIDES

Well, let them roll me out; as to coming down, I have not the time.

(*The eccyclema turns and presents the interior of the house.* EURIPIDES *is lying on a bed, his slave beside him. On the back wall are hung up tragic costumes of every sort and a multitude of accessories is piled up on the floor.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

Euripides . . .

EURIPIDES

What words strike my ear?

DICAEOPOLIS

You perch aloft to compose tragedies, when you might just as well do them on the ground. No wonder you introduce cripples on the stage. And why do you dress in these miserable tragic rags? No wonder your heroes are beggars. But, Euripides, on my knees I beseech you, give me the tatters of some old piece; for I have to treat the Chorus to a long speech, and if I do it badly it is all over with me.

EURIPIDES

What rags do you prefer? Those in which I rigged out Oeneus on the stage, that unhappy, miserable old man?

DICAEOPOLIS

No, I want those of some hero still more unfortunate.

EURIPIDES

Of Phœnix, the blind man?

DICAEOPOLIS

No, not of Phœnix, you have another hero more unfortunate than him.

EURIPIDES (*to himself*)

Now, what tatters *does* he want? (*to* DICAEOPOLIS) Do you mean those of the beggar Philoctetes?

DICAEOPOLIS

No, of another far more beggarly.

EURIPIDES

Is it the filthy dress of the lame fellow, Bellerophon?

DICAEOPOLIS

No, not Bellerophon; the one I mean was not only lame and a beggar, but boastful and a fine speaker.

EURIPIDES

Ah! I know, it is Telephus, the Mysian.

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, Telephus. Give me his rags, I beg of you.

EURIPIDES

Slave! give him Telephus' tatters; they are on top of the rags of Thyestes and mixed with those of Ino. There they are; take them.

DICAEOPOLIS (*holding up the costume for the audience to see*)

Oh! Zeus, whose eye pierces everywhere and embraces all, permit me to assume the most wretched dress on earth. Euripides, cap your kindness by giving me the little Mysian hat, that goes so well with these tatters. I must to-day have the look of a beggar; "be what I am, but not appear to be"; the audience will know well who I am, but the Chorus will be fools enough not to, and I shall dupe them with my subtle phrases.

EURIPIDES

I will give you the hat; I love the clever tricks of an ingenious brain like yours.

DICAEOPOLIS

Rest happy, and may it befall Telephus as I wish. Ah, I already feel myself filled with quibbles. But I must have a beggar's staff.

EURIPIDES (*handing him a staff*)
Here you are, and now get away from this porch.

DICAEOPOLIS
Oh, my soul! You see how you are driven from this house, when I still need so many accessories. But let us be pressing, obstinate, importunate. Euripides, give me a little basket with a lamp lighted inside.

EURIPIDES
Whatever do you want such a thing as that for?

DICAEOPOLIS
I do not need it, but I want it all the same.

EURIPIDES (*handing him a basket*)
You importune me; get out of here!

DICAEOPOLIS
Alas! may the gods grant you a destiny as brilliant as your mother's.[6]

EURIPIDES
Leave me in peace.

DICAEOPOLIS
Oh, just a little broken cup.

EURIPIDES (*handing him a cup*)
Take it and go and hang yourself. (*to himself*) What a tiresome fellow!

DICAEOPOLIS
Ah! you do not know all the pain you cause me. Dear, good Euripides, just a little pot with a sponge for a stopper.

EURIPIDES
Miserable man! You are stealing a whole tragedy. Here, take it and be off.

(*He hands* DICAEOPOLIS *a pot.*)

DICAEOPOLIS
I am going, but, great gods! I need one thing more; unless I have it, I am a dead man. Hearken, my little Euripides, only give me this and I go, never to return. For pity's sake, do give me a few small herbs for my basket.

EURIPIDES
You wish to ruin me then. Here, take what you want; but it is all over with my plays!

(*He hands him some herbs.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

I won't ask another thing; I'm going. I am too importunate and forget that I rouse against me the hate of kings. (*He starts to leave, then returns quickly*) Ah! wretch that I am! I am lost! I have forgotten one thing, without which all the rest is as nothing. Euripides, my excellent Euripides, my dear little Euripides, may I die if I ask you again for the smallest present; only one, the last, absolutely the last; give me some of the chervil your mother left you in her will.

EURIPIDES

Insolent hound! Slave, lock the door! (*The ecccyclema turns back again.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, my soul! we must go away without the chervil. Art thou sensible of the dangerous battle we are about to engage upon in defending the Lacedaemonians? Courage, my soul, we must plunge into the midst of it. Dost thou hesitate and art thou fully steeped in Euripides? That's right! do not falter, my poor heart, and let us risk our head to say what we hold for truth. Courage and boldly to the front. I am astonished at my bravery. (*He approaches the block.*)

CHORUS (*singing; excitedly*)

What do you purport doing? what are you going to say? What an impudent fellow! what a brazen heart! to dare to stake his head and uphold an opinion contrary to that of us all! And he does not tremble to face this peril! Come, it is you who desired it, speak!

DICAEOPOLIS

Spectators, be not angered if, although I am a beggar, I dare in a comedy to speak before the people of Athens of the public weal; even Comedy can sometimes discern what is right. I shall not please, but I shall say what is true. Besides, Cleon shall not be able to accuse me of attacking Athens before strangers; we are by ourselves at the festival of the Lenæa; the time when our allies send us their tribute and their soldiers is not yet here. There is only the pure wheat without the chaff; as to the resident aliens settled among us, they and the citizens are one, like the straw and the ear.

I detest the Lacedaemonians with all my heart, and may Posidon, the god of Taenarus, cause an earthquake and overturn their dwellings! My vines too have been cut. But come (there are only friends who hear me), why accuse the Laconians of all our woes? Some men (I do not say the city, note particularly that I do not say the city), some wretches, lost in vices, bereft of honour, who were not even citizens of good stamp, but

strangers, have accused the Megarians of introducing their produce fraudulently, and not a cucumber, a leveret, a suckling pig, a clove of garlic, a lump of salt was seen without its being said, "Halloa! these come from Megara," and their being instantly confiscated. Thus far the evil was not serious and we were the only sufferers. But now some young drunkards go to Megara and carry off the harlot Simaetha; the Megarians, hurt to the quick, run off in turn with two harlots of the house of Aspasia; and so for three whores Greece is set ablaze. Then Pericles, aflame with ire on his Olympian height, let loose the lightning, caused the thunder to roll, upset Greece and passed an edict, which ran like the song, "That the Megarians be banished both from our land and from our markets and from the sea and from the continent." Meanwhile the Megarians, who were beginning to die of hunger, begged the Lacedaemonians to bring about the abolition of the decree, of which those harlots were the cause; several times we refused their demand; and from that time there was a horrible clatter of arms everywhere. You will say that Sparta was wrong, but what should she have done? Answer that. Suppose that a Lacedaemonian had seized a little Seriphian dog on any pretext and had sold it, would you have endured it quietly? Far from it, you would at once have sent three hundred vessels to sea, and what an uproar there would have been through all the city! there it's a band of noisy soldiery, here a brawl about the election of a Trierarch; elsewhere pay is being distributed, the Pallas figure-heads are being regilded, crowds are surging under the market porticos, encumbered with wheat that is being measured, wine-skins, oar-leathers, garlic, olives, onions in nets; everywhere are chaplets, sprats, flute-girls, black eyes; in the arsenal bolts are being noisily driven home, sweeps are being made and fitted with leathers; we hear nothing but the sound of whistles, of flutes and fifes to encourage the workers. That is what you assuredly would have done, and would not Telephus have done the same? So I come to my general conclusion; we have no common sense.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Oh! wretch! oh! infamous man! You are naught but a beggar and yet you dare to talk to us like this! you insult their worships the informers!

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

By Posidon! he speaks the truth; he has not lied in a single detail.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

But though it be true, need he say it? But you'll have no great cause to be proud of your insolence!

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Where are you running to? Don't you move; if you strike this man, I shall be at you.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*bursting into song*)

Oh! Lamachus, whose glance flashes lightning, whose plume petrifies thy foes, help! Oh! Lamachus, my friend, the hero of my tribe and all of you, both officers and soldiers, defenders of our walls, come to my aid; else is it all over with me!

(LAMACHUS *comes out of his house armed from head to foot.*)

LAMACHUS

Whence comes this cry of battle? where must I bring my aid? where must I sow dread? who wants me to uncase my dreadful Gorgon's head?

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, Lamachus, great hero! Your plumes and your cohorts terrify me.

CHORUS-LEADER

This man, Lamachus, incessantly abuses Athens.

LAMACHUS

You are but a mendicant and you dare to use language of this sort?

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, brave Lamachus, forgive a beggar who speaks at hazard.

LAMACHUS

But what have you said? Let us hear.

DICAEOPOLIS

I know nothing about it; the sight of weapons makes me dizzy. Oh! I adjure you, take that fearful Gorgon somewhat farther away.

LAMACHUS

There.

DICAEOPOLIS

Now place it face downwards on the ground.

LAMACHUS

It is done.

DICAEOPOLIS

Give me a plume out of your helmet.

LAMACHUS

Here is a feather.

DICAEOPOLIS

And hold my head while I vomit; the plumes have turned my stomach.

LAMACHUS

Hah! what are you proposing to do? do you want to make yourself vomit with this feather?

DICAEOPOLIS

Is it a feather? what bird's? a braggart's?

LAMACHUS

Hah! I will rip you open.

DICAEOPOLIS

No, no, Lamachus! Violence is out of place here! But as you are so strong, why did you not circumcise me? You have all the tools you need for the operation there.

LAMACHUS

A beggar dares thus address a general!

DICAEOPOLIS

How? Am I a beggar?

LAMACHUS

What are you then?

DICAEOPOLIS

Who am I? A good citizen, not ambitious; a soldier, who has fought well since the outbreak of the war, whereas you are but a vile mercenary.

LAMACHUS

They elected me . . .

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, three cuckoos did! If I have concluded peace, it was disgust that drove me; for I see men with hoary heads in the ranks and young fellows of your age shirking service. Some are in Thrace getting an allowance of three drachmae, such fellows as Tisamenophaenippus and Panurgipparchides. The others are with Chares or in Chaonia, men like Geretotheodorus and Diomialazon; there are some of the same kidney, too, at Camarina, at Gela, and at Catagela.

LAMACHUS

They were elected.

DICAEOPOLIS

And why do you always receive your pay, when none of these others ever gets any? Speak, Marilades, you have grey hair; well then, have you ever been entrusted with a mission? See! he shakes his head. Yet he is

an active as well as a prudent man. And you, Anthracyllus or Euphorides or Prinides, have you knowledge of Ecbatana or Chaonia? You say no, do you not? Such offices are good for the son of Coesyra and Lamachus, who, but yesterday ruined with debt, never pay their shot, and whom all their friends avoid as foot passengers dodge the folks who empty their slops out of window.

LAMACHUS

Oh! in freedom's name! are such exaggerations to be borne?

DICAEOPOLIS

Not unless Lamachus gets paid for it.

LAMACHUS

But I propose always to war with the Peloponnesians, both at sea, on land and everywhere to make them tremble, and trounce them soundly.

(*He goes back into his house.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

For my own part, I make proclamation to all Peloponnesians, Megarians and Boeotians, that to them my markets are open; but I debar Lamachus from entering them.

(*He goes into his house.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Convinced by this man's speech, the folk have changed their view and approve him for having concluded peace. But let us prepare for the recital of the parabasis.

(*The* CHORUS *moves forward and faces the audience.*)

Never since our poet presented comedies, has he praised himself upon the stage; but, having been slandered by his enemies amongst the volatile Athenians, accused of scoffing at his country and of insulting the people, to-day he wishes to reply and regain for himself the inconstant Athenians. He maintains that he has done much that is good for you; if you no longer allow yourselves to be too much hoodwinked by strangers or seduced by flattery, if in politics you are no longer the ninnies you once were, it is thanks to him. Formerly, when delegates from other cities wanted to deceive you, they had but to style you, "the people crowned with violets," and at the word "violets" you at once sat erect on the tips of your bums. Or if, to tickle your vanity, someone spoke of "rich and sleek Athens," in return for that "sleekness" he would get anything he wanted, because he spoke of you as he would have of anchovies in oil. In cautioning you against such wiles, the poet has done you great service as well as in forcing you to understand what is really the democratic principle. Thus the strangers, who came to pay their tributes, wanted to see this great poet,

who had dared to speak the truth to Athens. And so far has the fame of his boldness reached that one day the Great King, when questioning the Lacedæmonian delegates, first asked them which of the two rival cities was the superior at sea, and then immediately demanded at which it was that the comic poet directed his biting satire. "Happy that city," he added, "if it listens to his counsel; it will grow in power, and its victory is assured." This is why the Lacedaemonians offer you peace, if you will cede them Aegina; not that they care for the isle, but they wish to rob you of your poet. As for you, never lose him, who will always fight for the cause of justice in his comedies; he promises you that his precepts will lead you to happiness, though he uses neither flattery, nor bribery, nor intrigue, nor deceit; instead of loading you with praise, he will point you to the better way. I scoff at Cleon's tricks and plotting; honesty and justice shall fight my cause; never will you find me a political poltroon, a prostitute to the highest bidder.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

I invoke thee, Acharnian Muse, fierce and fell as the devouring fire; sudden as the spark that bursts from the crackling oaken coal when roused by the quickening fan to fry little fishes, while others knead the dough or whip the sharp Thasian pickle with rapid hand, so break forth, my Muse, and inspire thy tribesmen with rough, vigorous, stirring strains.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

We others, now old men and heavy with years, we reproach the city; so many are the victories we have gained for the Athenian fleets that we well deserve to be cared for in our declining life; yet far from this, we are ill-used, harassed with law-suits, delivered over to the scorn of stripling orators. Our minds and bodies being ravaged with age, Posidon should protect us, yet we have no other support than a staff. When standing before the judge, we can scarcely stammer forth the fewest words, and of justice we see but its barest shadow, whereas the accuser, desirous of conciliating the younger men, overwhelms us with his ready rhetoric; he drags us before the judge, presses us with questions, lays traps for us; the onslaught troubles, upsets and ruins poor old Tithonus, who, crushed with age, stands tongue-tied; sentenced to a fine, he weeps, he sobs and says to his friend, "This fine robs me of the last trifle that was to have bought my coffin."

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Is this not a scandal? What! the clepsydra is to kill the white-haired veteran, who, in fierce fighting, has so oft covered himself with glorious sweat, whose valour at Marathon saved the country! We

were the ones who pursued on the field of Marathon, whereas now it is wretches who pursue us to the death and crush us. What would Marpsias reply to this?

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

What an injustice that a man, bent with age like Thucydides, should be brow-beaten by this braggart advocate, Cephisodemus, who is as savage as the Scythian desert he was born in! I wept tears of pity when I saw a Scythian maltreat this old man, who, by Ceres, when he was young and the true Thucydides, would not have permitted an insult from Ceres herself! At that date he would have floored ten orators like Euathlus, he would have terrified three thousand Scythians with his shouts; he would have pierced the whole line of the enemy with his shafts. Ah! but if you will not leave the aged in peace, decree that the advocates be matched; thus the old man will only be confronted with a toothless greybeard, the young will fight with the braggart, the ignoble with the son of Clinias; make a law that in the future, the old man can only be summoned and convicted at the courts by the aged and the young man by the youth.

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out of his house and marking out a square in front of it*)

These are the confines of my market-place. All Peloponnesians, Megarians, Boeotians, have the right to come and trade here, provided they sell their wares to me and not to Lamachus. As market-inspectors I appoint these three whips of Leprean leather, chosen by lot. Warned away are all informers and all men of Phasis. They are bringing me the pillar on which the treaty is inscribed and I shall erect it in the centre of the market, well in sight of all.

(*He goes back into the house just as a Megarian enters from the left, carrying a sack on his shoulder and followed by his two little daughters.*)

MEGARIAN

Hail! market of Athens, beloved of Megarians. Let Zeus, the patron of friendship, witness, I regretted you as a mother mourns her son. Come, poor little daughters of an unfortunate father, try to find something to eat; listen to me with the full heed of an empty belly. Which would you prefer? To be sold or to cry with hunger?

DAUGHTERS

To be sold, to be sold!

MEGARIAN

That is my opinion too. But who would make so sorry a deal as to buy you? Ah! I recall me a Megarian trick; I am going to disguise you as

little porkers, that I am offering for sale. Fit your hands with these hoofs and take care to appear the issue of a sow of good breed, for, if I am forced to take you back to the house, by Hermes! you will suffer cruelly of hunger! Then fix on these snouts and cram yourselves into this sack. Forget not to grunt and to say wee-wee like the little pigs that are sacrificed in the Mysteries. I must summon Dicaeopolis. Where is he? (*Loudly*) Dicaeopolis, do you want to buy some nice little porkers?

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out of his house*)

Who are you? a Megarian?

MEGARIAN

I have come to your market.

DICAEOPOLIS

Well, how are things at Megara?

MEGARIAN

We are crying with hunger at our firesides.

DICAEOPOLIS

The fireside is jolly enough with a piper.[7] But what else is doing at Megara?

MEGARIAN

What else? When I left for the market, the authorities were taking steps to let us die in the quickest manner.

DICAEOPOLIS

That is the best way to get you out of all your troubles.

MEGARIAN

True.

DICAEOPOLIS

What other news of Megara? What is wheat selling at?

MEGARIAN

With us it is valued as highly as the very gods in heaven!

DICAEOPOLIS

Is it salt that you are bringing?

MEGARIAN

Aren't you the ones that are holding back the salt? [8]

DICAEOPOLIS

Is it garlic then?

MEGARIAN

What! garlic! do you not at every raid like mice grub up the ground with your pikes to pull out every single head?

DICAEOPOLIS

What *are* you bringing then?

MEGARIAN

Little sows, like those they immolate at the Mysteries."

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! very well, show me them.

MEGARIAN

They are very fine; feel their weight. See! how fat and fine.

DICAEOPOLIS (*feeling around in the sack*)

Hey! what's *this?*

MEGARIAN

A sow.

DICAEOPOLIS

A *sow*, you say? Where from, then?

MEGARIAN

From Megara. What! isn't it a sow then?

DICAEOPOLIS (*feeling around in the sack again*)

No, I don't believe it is.

MEGARIAN

This is too much! what an incredulous man! He says it's not a sow; but we will stake, if you will, a measure of salt ground up with thyme, that in good Greek this is called a sow and nothing else.

DICAEOPOLIS

But a sow of the human kind.

MEGARIAN

Without question, by Diocles! of my own breed! Well! What think you? would you like to hear them squeal?

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, I would.

MEGARIAN

Cry quickly, wee sowlet; squeak up, hussy, or by Hermes! I take you back to the house.

DAUGHTERS

Wee-wee, wee-wee!

MEGARIAN

Is that a little sow, or not?

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, it seems so; but let it grow up, and it will be a fine fat thing.

MEGARIAN

In five years it will be just like its mother.

DICAEOPOLIS

But it cannot be sacrificed.

MEGARIAN

And why not?

DICAEOPOLIS

It has no tail.

MEGARIAN

Because it is quite young, but in good time it will have a big one, thick and red. But if you are willing to bring it up you will have a very fine sow.

DICAEOPOLIS

The two are as like as two peas.

MEGARIAN

They are born of the same father and mother; let them be fattened, let them grow their bristles, and they will be the finest sows you can offer to Aphrodité.

DICAEOPOLIS

But sows are not immolated to Aphrodité.

MEGARIAN

Not sows to Aphrodité! Why, she's the only goddess to whom they are offered! the flesh of my sows will be excellent on your spit.

DICAEOPOLIS

Can they eat alone? They no longer need their mother?

MEGARIAN

Certainly not, nor their father.

DICAEOPOLIS

What do they like most?

MEGARIAN

Whatever is given them; but ask for yourself.

DICAEOPOLIS

Speak! little sow.

DAUGHTERS

Wee-wee, wee-wee!

DICAEOPOLIS

Can you eat chick-pease? [10]

DAUGHTERS

Wee-wee, wee-wee, wee-wee!

DICAEOPOLIS

And Attic figs?

DAUGHTERS

Wee-wee, wee-wee!

DICAEOPOLIS

What sharp squeaks at the name of figs. Come, let some figs be brought for these little pigs. Will they eat them? Goodness! how they munch them, what a grinding of teeth, mighty Heracles! I believe those pigs hail from the land of the Voracians.

MEGARIAN (*aside*)

But they have not eaten all the figs; I took this one myself.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! what curious creatures! For what sum will you sell them?

MEGARIAN

I will give you one for a bunch of garlic, and the other, if you like, for a quart measure of salt.

DICAEOPOLIS

I'll buy them. Wait for me here.

(*He goes into the house.*)

MEGARIAN

The deal is done. Hermes, god of good traders, grant I may sell both my wife and my mother in the same way!

(*An* INFORMER *enters.*)

INFORMER

Hi! fellow, what country are you from?

MEGARIAN

I am a pig-merchant from Megara.

INFORMER

I shall denounce both your pigs and yourself as public enemies.

MEGARIAN

Ah! here our troubles begin afresh!

INFORMER

Let go of that sack. I'll teach you to talk Megarian!

MEGARIAN (*loudly*)

Dicaeopolis, Dicaeopolis, they want to denounce me.

DICAEOPOLIS (*from within*)

Who dares do this thing? (*He comes out of his house.*) Inspectors, drive out the informers. Ah! you offer to enlighten us without a lamp! [11]

INFORMER

What! I may not denounce our enemies?

DICAEOPOLIS (*with a threatening gesture*)

Watch out for yourself, and go off pretty quick and denounce elsewhere.

(*The* INFORMER *runs away.*)

MEGARIAN

What a plague to Athens!

DICAEOPOLIS

Be reassured, Megarian. Here is the price for your two sowlets, the garlic and the salt. Farewell and much happiness!

MEGARIAN

Ah! we never have that amongst us.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, I'm sorry if I said the wrong thing.

MEGARIAN

Farewell, dear little sows, and seek, far from your father, to munch your bread with salt, if they give you any.

(*He departs and* DICAEOPOLIS *takes the "sows" into his house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Here is a man truly happy. See how everything succeeds to his wish. Peacefully seated in his market, he will earn his living; woe to Ctesias, and all other informers who dare to enter there! You will not be cheated as to the value of wares, you will not again see Prepis wiping his big arse, nor will Cleonymus jostle you; you will take your walks, clothed in a fine tunic, without meeting Hyperbolus and his unceasing quibblings, without being accosted on the public place by any importunate fellow, neither by Cratinus, shaven in the fashion of the adulterers, nor by this musician, who plagues us with his silly improvisations, that hyper-rogue Artemo, with his arm-pits stinking as foul as a goat, like his father before him. You will not be the butt of the villainous Pauson's jeers, nor of Lysistratus, the disgrace of the Cholargian deme, who is the incarnation of all the vices, and endures cold and hunger more than thirty days in the month.

(*A* BOEOTIAN *enters, followed by his slave, who is carrying a large assortment of articles of food, and by a troop of flute players.*)

BOEOTIAN

By Heracles! my shoulder is quite black and blue. Ismenias, put the penny-royal down there very gently, and all of you, musicians from Thebes, strike up on your bone flutes "The Dog's Arse."

(*The Musicians immediately begin an atrocious rendition of a vulgar tune.*)

DICAEOPOLIS

Enough, damn you; get out of here! Rascally hornets, away with you! Whence has sprung this accursed swarm of Chaeris fellows which comes assailing my door?

(*The Musicians depart.*)

BOEOTIAN

Ah! by Iolas! Drive them off, my dear host, you will please me immensely; all the way from Thebes, they were there piping behind me and they have completely stripped my penny-royal of its blossom. But will you buy anything of me, some chickens or some locusts?

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! good day, Boeotian, eater of good round loaves. What do *you* bring?

BOEOTIAN

All that is good in Boeotia, marjoram, penny-royal, rush-mats, lamp-wicks, ducks, jays, woodcocks, water-fowl, wrens, divers.

DICAEOPOLIS

A regular hail of birds is beating down on my market.

BOEOTIAN

I also bring geese, hares, foxes, moles, hedgehogs, cats, lyres, martins, otters and eels from the Copaic lake.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! my friend, you, who bring me the most delicious of fish, let me salute your eels.

BOEOTIAN (*in tragic style*)

Come, thou, the eldest of my fifty Copaic virgins, come and complete the joy of our host.

DICAEOPOLIS (*likewise*)

Oh! my well-beloved, thou object of my long regrets, thou art here at last then, thou, after whom the comic poets sigh, thou, who art dear to Morychus. Slaves, hither with the stove and the bellows. Look at this charming eel, that returns to us after six long years of absence. Salute it, my children; as for myself, I will supply coal to do honour to the stranger Take it into my house; death itself could not separate me from her, if cooked with beet leaves.

BOEOTIAN

And what will you give me in return?

DICAEOPOLIS

It will pay for your market dues. And as to the rest, what do you wish to sell me?

BOEOTIAN

Why, everything.

DICAEOPOLIS

On what terms? For ready-money or in wares from these parts?

BOEOTIAN

I would take some Athenian produce, that we have not got in Boeotia.

DICAEOPOLIS

Phaleric anchovies, pottery?

BOEOTIAN

Anchovies, pottery? But these we have. I want produce that is wanting with us and that is plentiful here.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! I have the very thing; take away an informer, packed up carefully as crockery-ware.

BOEOTIAN

By the twin gods! I should earn big money, if I took one; I would exhibit him as an ape full of spite.

DICAEOPOLIS (*as an informer enters*)

Hah! here we have Nicarchus, who comes to denounce you.

BOEOTIAN

How small he is!

DICAEOPOLIS

But all pure evil.

NICARCHUS

Whose are these goods?

DICAEOPOLIS

Mine; they come from Boeotia, I call Zeus to witness.

NICARCHUS

I denounce them as coming from an enemy's country.

BOEOTIAN

What! you declare war against birds?

NICARCHUS

And I am going to denounce you too.

BOEOTIAN

What harm have I done you?

NICARCHUS

I will say it for the benefit of those that listen; you introduce lamp-wicks from an enemy's country.

DICAEOPOLIS

Then you even denounce a wick.

NICARCHUS

It needs but one to set an arsenal afire.

DICAEOPOLIS

A wick set an arsenal ablaze! But how, great gods?

NICARCHUS

Should a Boeotian attach it to an insect's wing, and, taking advantage of a violent north wind, throw it by means of a tube into the arsenal and the fire once get hold of the vessels, everything would soon be devoured by the flames.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! wretch! an insect and a wick devour everything!

(*He strikes him.*)

NICARCHUS (*to the* CHORUS)

You will bear witness, that he mishandles me.

DICAEOPOLIS (*to the* BOEOTIAN)

Shut his mouth. Give me some hay; I am going to pack him up like a vase, that he may not get broken on the road.

(*The* INFORMER *is bound and gagged and packed in hay.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Pack up your goods carefully, friend; that the stranger may not break it when taking it away.

DICAEOPOLIS

I shall take great care with it. (*He hits the* INFORMER *on the head and a stifled cry is heard.*) One would say he is cracked already; he rings with a false note, which the gods abhor.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But what will be done with him?

DICAEOPOLIS

This is a vase good for all purposes; it will be used as a vessel for holding all foul things, a mortar for pounding together law-suits, a lamp for spying upon accounts, and as a cup for the mixing up and poisoning of everything.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

None could ever trust a vessel for domestic use that has such a ring about it.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh! it is strong, my friend, and will never get broken, if care is taken to hang it head downwards.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to the* BOEOTIAN)
There! it is well packed now!

BOEOTIAN
Well then, I will proceed to carry off my bundle.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
Farewell, worthiest of strangers, take this informer, good for anything, and fling him where you like.

DICAEOPOLIS
Bah! this rogue has given me enough trouble to pack! Here! Boeotian, pick up your pottery.

BOEOTIAN
Stoop, Ismenias, that I may put it on your shoulder, and be very careful with it.

DICAEOPOLIS
You carry nothing worth having; however, take it, for you will profit by your bargain; the informers will bring you luck.
(*The* BOEOTIAN *and his slave depart;* DICAEOPOLIS *goes into his house; a slave comes out of* LAMACHUS' *house.*)

SLAVE
Dicaeopolis!

DICAEOPOLIS (*from within*)
What's the matter? Why are you calling me?

SLAVE
Lamachus wants to keep the Feast of Cups, and I come by his order to bid you one drachma for some thrushes and three more for a Copiac eel.

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out*)
And who is this Lamachus, who demands an eel?

SLAVE (*in tragic style*)
He is the terrible, indefatigable Lamachus, who is always brandishing his fearful Gorgon's head and the three plumes which o'ershadow his helmet.

DICAEOPOLIS
No, no, he will get nothing, even though he gave me his buckler. Let him eat salt fish while he shakes his plumes, and, if he comes here making any din, I shall call the inspectors. As for myself, I shall take away all these goods; (*in tragic style*) I go home on thrushes' wings and blackbirds' pinions. (*He goes into his house.*)

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

You see, citizens, you see the good fortune which this man owes to his prudence, to his profound wisdom. You see how, since he has concluded peace, he buys what is useful in the household and good to eat hot. All good things flow towards him unsought. Never will I welcome the god of war in *my* house; never shall *he* sing the "Harmodius" at my table; he is a sot, who comes feasting with those who are overflowing with good things and brings all manner of mischief in his train. He overthrows, ruins, rips open; it is vain to make him a thousand offers, to say "be seated, pray, and drink this cup, proffered in all friendship"; he burns our vine-stocks and brutally spills on the ground the wine from our vineyards.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

This man, on the other hand, covers his table with a thousand dishes; proud of his good fortunes, he has had these feathers cast before his door to show us how he lives. (*A woman appears, bearing the attributes of Peace.*) Oh, Peace! companion of fair Aphroditê and of the sweet Graces, how charming are thy features and yet I never knew it! Would that Eros might join me to thee, Eros crowned with roses as Zeuxis shows him to us! Do I seem somewhat old to thee? I am yet able to make thee a threefold offering; despite my age I could plant a long row of vines for you; then beside these some tender cuttings from the fig; finally a young vine-stock, loaded with fruit, and all around the field olive trees, to furnish us with oil wherewith to anoint us both at the New Moons.

(*A* HERALD *enters*)

HERALD

Oyez, oyez! As was the custom of your forebears, empty a full pitcher of wine at the call of the trumpet; he who first sees the bottom shall get a wine-skin as round and plump as Ctesiphon's belly.

DICAEOPOLIS (*coming out of the house; to his family within*)

Women, children, have you not heard? Faith! do you not heed the herald? Quick! let the hares boil and roast merrily; keep them turning; withdraw them from the flame, prepare the chaplets; reach me the skewers that I may spit the thrushes.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

I envy you your wisdom and even more your good cheer.

DICAEOPOLIS

What then will you say when you see the thrushes roasting?

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Ah! true indeed!

DICAEOPOLIS

Slave! stir up the fire.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

See, how he knows his business, what a perfect cook! How well he understands the way to prepare a good dinner!

(*A* HUSBANDMAN *enters in haste.*)

HUSBANDMAN

Ah! woe is me!

DICAEOPOLIS

Heracles! What have we here?

HUSBANDMAN

A most miserable man.

DICAEOPOLIS

Keep your misery for yourself.

HUSBANDMAN

Ah! friend! since you alone are enjoying peace, grant me a part of your truce, were it but five years.

DICAEOPOLIS

What has happened to you?

HUSBANDMAN

I am ruined; I have lost a pair of steers.

DICAEOPOLIS

How?

HUSBANDMAN

The Boeotians seized them at Phylé.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! poor wretch! and do you still wear white?

HUSBANDMAN

Their dung made my wealth.

DICAEOPOLIS

What can I do in the matter?

HUSBANDMAN

Crying for my beasts has lost me my eyesight. Ah! if you care for poor Dercetes of Phylé, anoint mine eyes quickly with your balm of peace.

DICAEOPOLIS

But, my poor fellow, I do not practise medicine.

HUSBANDMAN

Come, I adjure you; perhaps I shall recover my steers.

DICAEOPOLIS

Impossible; away, go and whine to the disciples of Pittalus.

HUSBANDMAN

Grant me but one drop of peace; pour it into this little reed.

DICAEOPOLIS

No, not a particle; go and weep somewhere else.

HUSBANDMAN (*as he departs*)

Oh! oh! oh! my poor beasts!

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

This man has discovered the sweetest enjoyment in peace; he will share it with none.

DICAEOPOLIS (*to a slave*)

Pour honey over this tripe; set it before the fire to dry.

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

What lofty tones he uses! Did you hear him?

DICAEOPOLIS (*to the slaves inside the house*)

Get the eels on the gridiron!

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

You are killing me with hunger; your smoke is choking your neighbours, and you split our ears with your bawling.

DICAEOPOLIS

Have this fried and let it be nicely browned.

(*He goes back into the house. A* WEDDING GUEST *enters, carrying a package.*)

WEDDING GUEST

Dicaeopolis! Dicaeopolis!

DICAEOPOLIS

Who are you?

WEDDING GUEST

A young bridegroom sends you these viands from the marriage feast.

DICAEOPOLIS

Whoever he be, I thank him.

WEDDING GUEST

And in return, he prays you to pour a glass of peace into this vase, that he may not have to go to the front and may stay at home to make love to his young wife.

DICAEOPOLIS

Take back, take back your viands; for a thousand drachmae I would not give a drop of peace. (*A young woman enters*) But who is she?

WEDDING GUEST

She is the matron of honour; she wants to say something to you from the bride privately.

DICAEOPOLIS

Come, what do you wish to say? (*The* MATRON OF HONOUR *whispers in his ear.*) *Ah!* what a ridiculous demand! The bride burns with longing to keep her husband's tool at home. Come! bring hither my truce; to her alone will I give some of it, for she is a woman, and, as such, should not suffer under the war. Here, friend, hand me your vial. And as to the manner of applying this balm, tell the bride, when a levy of soldiers is made, to rub some in bed on her husband, where most needed. (*The* MATRON OF HONOUR *and the* WEDDING GUEST *depart.*) There, slave, take away my truce! Now, quick, bring me the wine-flagon, that I may fill up the drinking bowls!

(*The slave leaves. A* HERALD *enters.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*in tragic style*)

I see a man, "striding along apace, with knitted brows; he seems to us the bearer of terrible tidings."

HERALD (*in tragic style*)

Oh! toils and battles and Lamachuses!

(*He knocks on* LAMACHUS' *door.*)

LAMACHUS (*from within; in tragic style*)

What noise resounds around my dwelling, where shines the glint of arms.

(*He comes out of his house.*)

HERALD

The Generals order you forthwith to take your battalions and your plumes, and, despite the snow, to go and guard our borders. They have learnt that a band of Boeotians intend taking advantage of the Feast of Cups to invade our country.

LAMACHUS

Ah! the Generals! they are numerous, but not good for much! It's cruel, not to be able to enjoy the feast!

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh! warlike host of Lamachus!

LAMACHUS

Wretch! do you dare to jeer me?

DICAEOPOLIS

Do you want to fight this four-winged Geryon?

LAMACHUS

Oh! oh! what fearful tidings!

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! ah! I see another herald running up; what news does he bring me?

(*Another* HERALD *enters.*)

HERALD

Dicaeopolis!

DICAEOPOLIS

What is the matter?

HERALD

Come quickly to the feast and bring your basket and your cup; it is the priest of Bacchus who invites you. But hasten, the guests have been waiting for you a long while. All is ready—couches, tables, cushions, chaplets, perfumes, dainties and whores to boot; biscuits, cakes, sesamé-bread, tarts, lovely dancing women, and the "Harmodius." But come with all speed.

LAMACHUS

Oh! hostile gods!

DICAEOPOLIS

This is not astounding; you have chosen this great ugly Gorgon's head for your patron. (*To a slave*) You, shut the door, and let someone get ready the meal.

LAMACHUS

Slave! slave! my knapsack!

DICAEOPOLIS

Slave! slave! a basket!

LAMACHUS

Take salt and thyme, slave, and don't forget the onions.

DICAEOPOLIS

Get some fish for me; I cannot bear onions.

LAMACHUS

Slave, wrap me up a little stale salt meat in a fig-leaf.

DICAEOPOLIS

And for me some nice fat tripe in a fig-leaf; I will have it cooked here.

LAMACHUS

Bring me the plumes for my helmet.

DICAEOPOLIS

Bring me wild pigeons and thrushes.

LAMACHUS

How white and beautiful are these ostrich feathers!

DICAEOPOLIS

How fat and well browned is the flesh of this wood-pigeon!

LAMACHUS (*to* DICAEOPOLIS)

My friend, stop scoffing at my armour.

DICAEOPOLIS (*to* LAMACHUS)

My friend, stop staring at my thrushes.

LAMACHUS (*to his slave*)

Bring me the case for my triple plume.

DICAEOPOLIS (*to his slave*)

Pass me over that dish of hare.

LAMACHUS

Alas! the moths have eaten the hair of my crest.

DICAEOPOLIS

Shall I eat my hare before dinner?

LAMACHUS

My friend, will you kindly not speak to me?

DICAEOPOLIS

I'm not speaking to you; I'm scolding my slave. (*To the slave*) Shall we wager and submit the matter to Lamachus, which of the two is the best to eat, a locust or a thrush?

LAMACHUS

Insolent hound!

DICAEOPOLIS

He much prefers the locusts.

LAMACHUS

Slave, unhook my spear and bring it to me.

DICAEOPOLIS

Slave, slave, take the sausage from the fire and bring it to me.

LAMACHUS

Come, let me draw my spear from its sheath. Hold it, slave, hold it tight.

DICAEOPOLIS

And you, slave, grip well hold of the skewer.

LAMACHUS

Slave, the bracings for my shield.

DICAEOPOLIS

Pull the loaves out of the oven and bring me these bracings of my stomach.

LAMACHUS

My round buckler with the Gorgon's head.

DICAEOPOLIS

My round cheese-cake.

LAMACHUS

What clumsy wit!

DICAEOPOLIS

What delicious cheese-cake!

LAMACHUS

Pour oil on the buckler. Hah! hah! I can see reflected there an old man who will be accused of cowardice.

DICAEOPOLIS

Pour honey on the cake. Hah! hah! I can see an old man who makes Lamachus of the Gorgon's head weep with rage.

LAMACHUS

Slave, full war armour.

DICAEOPOLIS

Slave, my beaker; that is *my* armour.

LAMACHUS

With this I hold my ground with any foe.

DICAEOPOLIS

And I with this in any drinking bout.

LAMACHUS

Fasten the strappings to the buckler.

DICAEOPOLIS

Pack the dinner well into the basket.

LAMACHUS

Personally I shall carry the knapsack.

DICAEOPOLIS

Personally I shall carry the cloak.

LAMACHUS

Slave, take up the buckler and let's be off. It is snowing! God help us! A wintry business!

DICAEOPOLIS

Take up the basket, mine's a festive business.

(*They depart in opposite directions.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We wish you both joy on your journeys, which differ so much. One goes to mount guard and freeze, while the other will drink, crowned with flowers, and then lie with a young beauty till he gets his tool all sore.

CHORUS (*singing*)

I say it freely; may Zeus confound Antimachus, the poet-historian, the son of Psacas! When Choregus at the Lenaea, alas! alas!

he dismissed me dinnerless. May I see him devouring with his eyes a cuttle-fish, just served, well cooked, hot and properly salted; and the moment that he stretches his hand to help himself, may a dog seize it and run off with it. Such is my first wish. I also hope for him a misfortune at night. That returning all-fevered from horse practice, he may meet an Orestes, mad with drink, who will crack him over the head; that wishing to seize a stone, he, in the dark, may pick up a fresh turd, hurl, miss him and hit Cratinus.

(*The slave of* LAMACHUS *enters.*)

SLAVE OF LAMACHUS (*knocking on the door of* LAMACHUS' *house, in tragic style*)

Captives present within the house of Lamachus, water, water in a little pot! Make it warm, get ready cloths, cerate, greasy wool and bandages for his ankle. In leaping a ditch, the master has hurt himself against a stake; he has dislocated and twisted his ankle, broken his head by falling on a stone, while his Gorgon shot far away from his buckler. His mighty braggadocio plume rolled on the ground; at this sight he uttered these doleful words, "Radiant star, I gaze on thee for the last time; my eyes close to all light, I die." Having said this, he falls into the water, gets out again, meets some runaways and pursues the robbers with his spear at their backsides. But here he comes, himself. Get the door open.

(*In this final scene all the lines are sung.*)

LAMACHUS (*limping in with the help of two soldiers and singing a song of woe*)

Oh! heavens! oh! heavens! What cruel pain! I faint, I tremble! Alas! I die! the foe's lance has struck me! But what would hurt me most would be for Dicaeopolis to see me wounded thus and laugh at my ill-fortune.

DICAEOPOLIS (*enters with two courtesans, singing gaily*)

Oh! my gods! what breasts! Swelling like quinces! Come, my treasures, give me voluptuous kisses! Glue your lips to mine. Haha! I was the first to empty my cup.

LAMACHUS

Oh! cruel fate! how I suffer! accursed wounds!

DICAEOPOLIS

Hah! hah! Hail! Lamachippus!

LAMACHUS

Woe is me!

DICAEOPOLIS (*to the one girl*)

Why do you kiss me?

LAMACHUS

Ah, wretched me!

DICAEOPOLIS (*to the other girl*)

And why do you bite me?

LAMACHUS

'Twas a cruel score I was paying back!

DICAEOPOLIS

Scores are not evened at the Feast of Cups!

LAMACHUS

Oh! Oh! Paean, Paean!

DICAEOPOLIS

But to-day is not the feast of Paean.

LAMACHUS (*to the soldiers*)

Oh! take hold of my leg, do; ah! hold it tenderly, my friends!

DICAEOPOLIS (*to the girls*)

And you, my darlings, take hold of my tool, both of you!

LAMACHUS

This blow with the stone makes me dizzy; my sight grows dim.

DICAEOPOLIS

For myself, I want to get to bed; I've got an erection and I want to make love in the dark.

LAMACHUS

Carry me to the surgeon Pittalus. Put me in his healing hands!

DICAEOPOLIS

Take me to the judges. Where is the king of the feast? The wine-skin is mine!

LAMACHUS (*as he is being carried away*)

That spear has pierced my bones; what torture I endure!

DICAEOPOLIS (*to the audience*)

You see this empty cup! I triumph! I triumph!

CHORUS

Old man, I come at your bidding! You triumph! you triumph!

DICAEOPOLIS

Again I have brimmed my cup with unmixed wine and drained it at a draught!

CHORUS

You triumph then, brave champion; thine is the wine-skin!

DICAEOPOLIS

Follow me, singing "Triumph! Triumph!"

CHORUS

Aye! we will sing of thee, thee and thy sacred wine-skin, and we all, as we follow thee, will repeat in thine honour, "Triumph, Triumph!"

1. Such was the esteem in which Aeschylus was held by his countrymen that even after his death it was especially decreed that his plays might be produced at the dramatic festivals, which otherwise were devoted exclusively to new compositions, and he is reported to have won several posthumous victories on such occasions.

2. The Athenian democracy presupposed a maximum of popular participation in the business of government, just as the Socialist democracy of the Soviet Union does today, and it is interesting to discover that in ancient times also certain special efforts had to be made to overcome human indolence and apathy in political matters. So many Athenians preferred the bustle of the market-place to the solemnity of the Assembly that it was customary to round up the dilatory with a long and freshly reddened rope; fines for tardiness would then be imposed on all who exhibited the telltale vermilion stripe.

3. The ingenuity of scholarship has yet to extract a satisfactory or apposite meaning from this jargon. Such passages usually mean something in Aristophanes, and the second speech of Pseudartabas is, as Dicaeopolis remarks, clear enough, but this line may be nothing more than a sample of what Persian sounded like to a Greek. The accents indicate the metre.

4. Many Athenians seem to have been as ready to leave, as they were reluctant to attend, the Assembly, and adjournment must occasionally have been effected on somewhat flimsy grounds.

5. While carrying out the comparison between truce-tasting and wine sampling, Aristophanes manages to convey his views on what sort of peace ought to be made; one of five years' duration would be merely a breathing spell for an armaments race, and one of ten would only give additional time for the conclusion of military alliances.

6. Aristophanes never tires of twitting Euripides with the fact or fancy that his mother had sold vegetables.

7. Dicaeopolis has misunderstood the Megarian, taking *peinames,* "we starve" for *pinomes,* "we drink"; hence his apparently inappropriate reply.

8. At this time the Athenians had possession of the island of Minoa off the Megarian coast; they were thus able to intercept all her maritime commerce, and they incidentally controlled her salt-works also.

9. This brilliant scene is a riotous tissue of plays on the double meaning of the Greek word *choiros,* which signifies not only "sow" but also "female genitalia." The English word "pussy" has comparable senses, but is regrettably ill-adapted to the needs of this particular scene, which must thus remain the Hellenist's delight and the translator's despair.

10. Here we find a pun similar to that on *choiros,* for the word *erebinthos* means both "chick-pea" and "penis"; the remark about figs in the next line seems also to contain such a *double entendre.*

11. This remark is a pun on the word *phaincin,* which means both "to light" and "to inform against."

II

THE KNIGHTS

Characters in the Play

Demosthenes
Nicias
Agoracritus, *a Sausage-Seller*
Cleon
Demos
Chorus of Knights

INTRODUCTION

JUST a year after the success of *The Acharnians,* at the Lenaea of 424, Aristophanes, under his own name, produced *The Knights* and was again victorious, this time with what is very nearly the poorest of the eleven comedies that have come down to us. In sharp contrast with the gay variety of *The Acharnians, The Knights* is sadly deficient in amusing incidents and all too liberally endowed with political and uncomic hate. Primarily and essentially a vitriolic attack on the demagogue Cleon, who but a few months previously had returned in triumph from Sphacteria and was now at the height of his powers, the play is a greater tribute to its author's courage and sincerity than to his art and taste. As a work of literature rather than as an historical and biographical document, perhaps the best that can be said in its favour is that it contributes materially to our knowledge of the formal and metrical structure of the Agon.

The opening scene introduces us to the amorphous characters and harassed situation of Demosthenes and Nicias, two faithful servants of Demos, who personifies the Athenian people. In a long speech addressed to the spectators Demosthenes explains that the chief cause of his distress is a recent addition to Demos' household, "a Paphlagonian tanner, an arrant rogue, the incarnation of calumny." This domineering and dishonest slave has rendered life intolerable for the others, and it is imperative that he be got rid of immediately. An oracle filched from his great collection reveals that the tanner is to be succeeded by a sausage-seller, and no sooner is this prophecy disclosed than just such a merchant appears and is astonished to find himself hailed as the saviour of Athens.

In a little while the Paphlagonian emerges from the house and the still bewildered sausage-seller is about to beat a hasty retreat, but Demosthenes summons the Knights to his rescue and the Chorus is thus introduced. Their vigorous attack on Cleon rallies the sausage-seller's ebbing spirits and a loud contest of vulgar denigration ensues between him and the tanner. This culminates in the decision of both combatants to go to the Senate in order to test in practice their demagogic talents. Their departure leaves the stage to the Chorus and the parabasis is now delivered.

The anapests explain why Aristophanes had hitherto concealed his identity beneath pseudonyms, and in the course of this pronounce a number of interesting animadversions on the precariousness of the comic poet's profession. The ode invokes and celebrates the god Posidon. The epirrheme extolls the courage of the earlier Athens and proclaims the patriotic devotion of the Knights. In the antode the Chorus calls to its aid Athene, the patron goddess of the city. The antepirrheme praises the Knights in a discreet and indirect fashion by lauding the valour and the exploits of their steeds.

At the conclusion of the parabasis the sausage-seller returns in triumph to announce and to narrate his victory over the Senate. As soon as he has done this the Paphlagonian arrives, bursting with fury and not yet willing to admit that the other is clearly his master in the very game in which he specializes. In accord with normal Athenian legislative procedure the decision is now put to the sovereign people, and Demos is summoned from his home to the Pnyx, where he listens gladly and proudly to the extravagant protestations of devotion made by the Paphlagonian and the sausage-seller. At long last the latter emerges triumphant and the tanner retires in utter confusion. Agoracritus, for the sausage-seller's name is now finally revealed, goes with Demos into his house and the Chorus delivers a sort of second parabasis, a passage filled with singular obscenity and personal vituperation. After this Agoracritus comes out of the house followed by a rejuvenated Demos, who intends to reestablish the pristine discipline of Athens.

Thus ends a comedy at once brave and bad, in which, however, the braveness does not quite compensate for the badness; Aristophanes is so eager to attack the detested Cleon that he neglects to write a real comedy. From Euripides to Odets this is what has always happened when the playwright is so misguided as to become primarily the propagandist. Aristophanes allows his hatred of Cleon to betray him into a surprisingly large number of inconsistencies and lapses of artistic restraint, and the fact that the play was crowned with the first prize may be variously attributed to the inferior merit of the comedies with which it competed, to popular participation in the author's political views, or to the admiration with which his obvious courage may have inspired the spectators; in any case the victory of *The Knights*, like the failure of *The Birds* a decade later, clearly demonstrates the whimsical instability and the dubious value of the vulgar taste.

THE KNIGHTS

(SCENE:—*The Orchestra represents the Pnyx at Athens; in the background is the house of* DEMOS.)

DEMOSTHENES

OH! alas! alas! Oh! woe! oh! woe! Miserable Paphlagonian! may the gods destroy both him and his cursed advice! Since that evil day when this new slave entered the house he has never ceased belabouring us with blows.

NICIAS

May the plague seize him, the arch-fiend—him and his lying tales!

DEMOSTHENES

Hah! my poor fellow, what is your condition?

NICIAS

Very wretched, just like your own.

DEMOSTHENES

Then come, let us sing a duet of groans in the style of Olympus.

DEMOSTHENES AND NICIAS

Boo, hoo! boo, hoo! boo, hoo! boo, hoo! boo, hoo! boo, hoo!!

DEMOSTHENES

Bah! it's lost labour to weep! Enough of groaning! Let us consider how to save our pelts.

NICIAS

But how to do it! Can you suggest anything?

DEMOSTHENES

No, you begin. I cede you the honour.

NICIAS

By Apollo! no, not I. Come, have courage! Speak, and then I will say what I think.

DEMOSTHENES (*in tragic style*)

"Ah! would you but tell me what I should tell you!"

NICIAS

I dare not. How could I express my thoughts with the pomp of Euripides?

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! please spare me! Do not pelt me with those vegetables,[1] but find some way of leaving our master.

NICIAS

Well, then! Say "Let-us-bolt," like this, in one breath.

DEMOSTHENES

I follow you—"Let-us-bolt."

NICIAS

Now after "Let-us-bolt" say "at-top-speed!"

DEMOSTHENES

"At-top-speed!"

NICIAS

Splendid! Just as if you were masturbating; first slowly, "Let-us-bolt"; then quick and firmly, "at-top-speed!"

DEMOSTHENES

Let-us-bolt, let-us-bolt-at-top-speed!

NICIAS

Hah! does that not please you?

DEMOSTHENES

Yes, indeed, yet I fear your omen bodes no good to my hide.

NICIAS

How so?

DEMOSTHENES

Because masturbation chafes the skin.

NICIAS

The best thing we can do for the moment is to throw ourselves at the feet of the statue of some god.

DEMOSTHENES

Of which statue? Any statue? Do you then believe there are gods?

NICIAS

Certainly.

DEMOSTHENES

What proof have you?

NICIAS

The proof that they have taken a grudge against me. Is that not enough?

DEMOSTHENES

I'm convinced it is. But to pass on. Do you consent to my telling the spectators of our troubles?

NICIAS

There's nothing wrong with that, and we might ask them to show us by their manner, whether our facts and actions are to their liking.

DEMOSTHENES

I will begin then. We have a very brutal master, a perfect glutton for beans, and most bad-tempered; it's Demos of the Pnyx, an intolerable old man and half deaf. The beginning of last month he bought a slave, a Paphlagonian tanner, an arrant rogue, the incarnation of calumny. This man of leather knows his old master thoroughly; he plays the fawning cur, flatters, cajoles, wheedles, and dupes him at will with little scraps of leavings, which he allows him to get. "Dear Demos," he will say, "try a single case and you will have done enough; then take your bath, eat, swallow and devour; here are three obols." Then the Paphlagonian filches from one of us what we have prepared and makes a present of it to our old man. The other day I had just kneaded a Spartan cake at Pylos, the cunning rogue came behind my back, sneaked it and offered the cake, which was my invention, in his own name. He keeps us at a distance and suffers none but himself to wait upon the master; when Demos is dining, he keeps close to his side with a thong in his hand and puts the orators to flight. He keeps singing oracles to him, so that the old man now thinks of nothing but the Sibyl. Then, when he sees him thoroughly obfuscated, he uses all his cunning and piles up lies and calumnies against the household; then we are scourged and the Paphlagonian runs about among the slaves to demand contributions with threats and gathers them in with both hands. He will say, "You see how I have had Hylas beaten! Either content me or die at once!" We are forced to give, for otherwise the old man tramples on us and makes us crap forth all our body contains. (*To* NICIAS) There must be an end to it, friend. Let us see! what can be done? Who will get us out of this mess?

NICIAS

The best thing, friend, is our famous "Let-us-bolt!"

DEMOSTHENES

But none can escape the Paphlagonian, his eye is everywhere. And what a stride! He has one leg on Pylos and the other in the Assembly; his arse gapes exactly over the land of the Chaonians, his hands are with the Aetolians and his mind with the Clopidians.

NICIAS

It's best then to die; but let us seek the most heroic death.

DEMOSTHENES

Let me think, what *is* the most heroic?

NICIAS

Let us drink the blood of a bull; that's the death Themistocles chose.

DEMOSTHENES

No, not that, but a bumper of good unmixed wine in honour of the Good Genius; perchance we may stumble on a happy thought.

NICIAS

Look at him! "Unmixed wine!" Your mind is on drink intent? Can a man strike out a brilliant thought when drunk?

DEMOSTHENES

Without question. Go, ninny, blow yourself out with water; do you dare to accuse wine of clouding the reason? Quote me more marvellous effects than those of wine. Look! when a man drinks, he is rich, everything he touches succeeds, he gains lawsuits, is happy and helps his friends. Come, bring hither quick a flagon of wine, that I may soak my brain and get an ingenious idea.

NICIAS

My God! What can your drinking do to help us?

DEMOSTHENES

Much. But bring it to me, while I take my seat. Once drunk, I shall strew little ideas, little phrases, little reasonings everywhere.
(NICIAS *enters the house and returns almost immediately with a bottle.*)

NICIAS

It is lucky I was not caught in the house stealing the wine.

DEMOSTHENES

Tell me, what is the Paphlagonian doing now?

NICIAS

The wretch has just gobbled up some confiscated cakes; he is drunk and lies at full-length snoring on his hides.

DEMOSTHENES

Very well, come along, pour me out wine and plenty of it.

NICIAS

Take it and offer a libation to your Good Genius.

DEMOSTHENES (*to himself*)

Inhale, ah, inhale the spirit of the genius of Prammium. (*He drinks. Inspiredly*) Ah! Good Genius, thine the plan, not mine!

NICIAS

Tell me, what is it?

DEMOSTHENES

Run indoors quick and steal the oracles of the Paphlagonian, while he is asleep.

NICIAS

Bless me! I fear this Good Genius will be but a very Bad Genius for me.

(*He goes into the house.*)

DEMOSTHENES

And I'll set the flagon near me, that I may moisten my wit to invent some brilliant notion.

(NICIAS *enters the house and returns at once.*)

NICIAS

How loudly the Paphlagonian farts and snores! I was able to seize the sacred oracle, which he was guarding with the greatest care, without his seeing me.

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! clever fellow! Hand it here, that I may read. Come, pour me out some drink, bestir yourself! Let me see what there is in it. Oh! prophecy! Some drink! some drink! Quick!

NICIAS

Well! what says the oracle?

DEMOSTHENES

Pour again.

NICIAS

Is "pour again" in the oracle?

DEMOSTHENES

Oh, Bacis!

NICIAS

But what is in it?

DEMOSTHENES

Quick! some drink!

NICIAS

Bacis is very dry!

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! miserable Paphlagonian! This then is why you have so long taken such precautions; your horoscope gave you qualms of terror.

NICIAS

What does it say?

DEMOSTHENES

It says here how he must end

NICIAS

And how?

DEMOSTHENES

How? the oracle announces clearly that a dealer in oakum must first govern the city.[2]

NICIAS

That's one tradesman. And after him, who?

DEMOSTHENES

After him, a sheep-dealer.

NICIAS

Two tradesmen, eh? And what is this one's fate?

DEMOSTHENES

To reign until a filthier scoundrel than he arises; then he perishes and in his place the leather-seller appears, the Paphlagonian robber, the bawler, who roars like a torrent.

NICIAS

And the leather-seller must destroy the sheep-seller?

DEMOSTHENES

Yes.

NICIAS

Oh! woe is me! Where can another seller be found, is there ever a one left?

DEMOSTHENES

There is yet one, who plies a first-rate trade.

NICIAS

Tell me, pray, what is that?

DEMOSTHENES

You really want to know?

NICIAS

Yes.

DEMOSTHENES

Well then! it's a sausage-seller who must overthrow him.

NICIAS

A sausage-seller! Ah! by Posidon! what a fine trade! But where can this man be found?

DEMOSTHENES

Let's seek him. But look! there he is, going towards the market-place; 'tis the gods, the gods who send him! (*Calling out*) This way, this way, oh, lucky sausage-seller, come forward, dear friend, our saviour, the saviour of our city.

(*Enter* AGORACRITUS, *a seller of sausages, carrying a basket of his wares.*)

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What is it? Why do you call me?

DEMOSTHENES

Come here, come and learn about your good luck, you who are Fortune's favourite!

NICIAS

Come! Relieve him of his basket-tray and tell him the oracle of the god; I will go and look after the Paphlagonian.

(*He goes into the house.*)

DEMOSTHENES

First put down all your gear, then worship the earth and the gods

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Done. What is the matter?

DEMOSTHENES

Happiness, riches, power; to-day you have nothing, to-morrow you will have all, oh! chief of happy Athens.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Why not leave me to wash my tripe and to sell my sausages instead of making game of me?

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! the fool! Your tripe! Do you see these tiers of people?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Yes.

DEMOSTHENES

You shall be master to them all, governor of the market, of the harbours, of the Pnyx; you shall trample the Senate under foot, be able to cashier the generals, load them with fetters, throw them into gaol, and you will fornicate in the Prytaneum.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What! I?

DEMOSTHENES

You, without a doubt. But you do not yet see all the glory awaiting you. Stand on your basket and look at all the islands that surround Athens.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I see them. What then?

DEMOSTHENES

Look at the storehouses and the shipping.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Yes, I am looking.

DEMOSTHENES

Exists there a mortal more blest than you? Furthermore, turn your right eye towards Caria and your left toward Carthage!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Then it's a blessing to be cock-eyed!

DEMOSTHENES

No, but you are the one who is going to trade away all this. According to the oracle you must become the greatest of men.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Just tell me how a sausage-seller can become a great man.

DEMOSTHENES

That is precisely why you will be great, because you are a sad rascal without shame, no better than a common market rogue.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I do not hold myself worthy of wielding power.

DEMOSTHENES

Oh! by the gods! Why do you not hold yourself worthy? Have you then such a good opinion of yourself? Come, are you of honest parentage?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

By the gods! No! of very bad indeed.

DEMOSTHENES

Spoilt child of fortune, everything fits together to ensure your greatness.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

But I have not had the least education. I can only read, and that very badly.

DEMOSTHENES

That is what may stand in your way, almost knowing how to read. A demagogue must be neither an educated nor an honest man; he has to be an ignoramus and a rogue. But do not, do not let go this gift, which the oracle promises.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

But what does the oracle say?

DEMOSTHENES

Faith, it is put together in very fine enigmatical style, as elegant as it is clear: "When the eagle-tanner with the hooked claws shall seize a stupid dragon, a blood-sucker, it will be an end to the hot Paphlagonian pickled garlic. The god grants great glory to the sausage-sellers unless they prefer to sell their wares."

SAUSAGE-SELLER

In what way does this concern me? Please instruct my ignorance.

DEMOSTHENES

The eagle-tanner is the Paphlagonian.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What do the hooked claws mean?

DEMOSTHENES

It means to say, that he robs and pillages us with his claw-like hands.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And the dragon?

DEMOSTHENES

That is quite clear. The dragon is long and so also is the sausage; the sausage like the dragon is a drinker of blood. Therefore the oracle says, that the dragon will triumph over the eagle-tanner, if he does not let himself be cajoled with words.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

The oracles of the gods flatter me! Faith! I do not at all understand how I can be capable of governing the people.

DEMOSTHENES

Nothing simpler. Continue your trade. Mix and knead together all the state business as you do for your sausages. To win the people, always cook them some savoury that pleases them. Besides, you possess all the attributes of a demagogue; a screeching, horrible voice, a perverse, cross-grained nature and the language of the market-place. In you all is united which is needful for governing. The oracles are in your favour, even including that of Delphi. Come, take a chaplet, offer a libation to the god of Stupidity and take care to fight vigorously.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Who will be my ally? for the rich fear the Paphlagonian and the poor shudder at the sight of him.

DEMOSTHENES

You will have a thousand brave Knights, who detest him, on your side; also the honest citizens amongst the spectators, those who are men of brave hearts, and finally myself and the god. Fear not, you will not see his features, for none have dared to make a mask resembling him. But the public have wit enough to recognize him.

NICIAS (*from within*)[4]

Oh! mercy! here comes the Paphlagonian!

(CLEON *rushes out of the house.*)

CLEON

By the twelve gods! Woe betide you, who have too long been conspiring against Demos. What means this Chalcidian cup? No doubt you are provoking the Chalcidians to revolt. You shall be killed and butchered, you brace of rogues.

DEMOSTHENES (*to the* SAUSAGE-SELLER)

What! are you for running away? Come, come, stand firm, bold Sausage-seller, do not betray us. To the rescue, oh, Knights. Now is the time. Simon, Panaetius, get you to the right wing; they are coming on; hold tight and return to the charge. I can see the dust of their horses' hoofs; they are galloping to our aid. (*To the* SAUSAGE-SELLER) Courage! Attack him, put him to flight.

(*The* CHORUS OF KNIGHTS *enters at top speed.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Strike, strike the villain, who has spread confusion amongst the ranks of the Knights, this public robber, this yawning gulf of plunder, this devouring Charybdis, this villain, this villain, this villain! I cannot say the word too often, for he *is* a villain a thousand times a day. Come, strike, drive, hurl him over and crush him to pieces; hate him as we hate him; stun him with your blows and your shouts. And beware lest he escape you; he knows the way Eucrates took straight to a bran sack for concealment.

CLEON

Oh! veteran Heliasts, brotherhood of the three obols, whom I fostered by bawling at random, help me; I am being beaten to death by rebels.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And justly too; you devour the public funds that all should share in; you treat the treasury officials like the fruit of the fig tree, squeezing them to find which are still green or more or less ripe; and, when you find a simple and timid one, you force him to come from the Chersonese, then you seize him by the middle, throttle him by the neck, while you twist his shoulder back; he falls and you devour him. Besides, you know very well how to select from among the citizens those who are as meek as lambs, rich, without guile and loathers of lawsuits.

CLEON

Eh! what! Knights, are you helping them? But, if I am beaten, it is in your cause, for I was going to propose to erect a statue in the city in memory of your bravery.[5]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! the impostor! the dull varlet! See! he treats us like old dotards and crawls at our feet to deceive us; but the cunning wherein his power lies shall this time recoil on himself; he trips up himself by resorting to such artifices.

CLEON

Oh citizens! oh people! see how these brutes are bursting my belly.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What shouts! but it's this very bawling that incessantly upsets the city!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I can shout too—and so loud that you will flee with fear.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you shout louder than he does I will strike up the triumphal hymn; if you surpass him in impudence the cake is ours.

CLEON

I denounce this fellow; he has had tasty stews exported from Athens for the Spartan fleet.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I denounce *him;* he runs into the Prytaneum with an empty belly and comes out with it full.

DEMOSTHENES

And by Zeus! he carries off bread, meat, and fish, which is forbidden. Pericles himself never had this right.

(*A screaming match now ensues, each line more raucous than the last. The rapidity of the dialogue likewise increases.*)

CLEON

You are travelling the right road to get killed.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I'll bawl three times as loud as you.

CLEON

I will deafen you with my yells.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I you with my bellowing.

CLEON

I shall calumniate you, if you become a Strategus.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Dog, I will lay your back open with the lash.

CLEON

I will make you drop your arrogance.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will baffle your machinations.

CLEON

Dare to look me in the face!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I too was brought up in the market-place.

CLEON

I will cut you to shreds if you whisper a word.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

If you open your mouth, I'll shut it with shit.

CLEON

I admit I'm a thief; that's more than you do.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

By our Hermes of the market-place, if caught in the act, why, I perjure myself before those who saw me.

CLEON

These are my own special tricks. I will denounce you to the Prytanes as the owner of sacred tripe, that has not paid tithe.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! you scoundrel! you impudent bawler! everything is filled with your daring, all Attica, the Assembly, the Treasury, the decrees, the tribunals. As a furious torrent you have overthrown our city; your outcries have deafened Athens and, posted upon a high rock, you have lain in wait for the tribute moneys as the fisherman does for the tunny-fish.

CLEON (*somewhat less loudly*)

I know your tricks; it's an old plot resoled.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

If you know naught of soling, I understand nothing of sausages; you,

who cut bad leather on the slant to make it look stout and deceive the country yokels. They had not worn it a day before it had stretched some two spans.

DEMOSTHENES

That's the very trick he played on me; both my neighbours and my friends laughed heartily at me, and before I reached Pergasae I was swimming in my shoes.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Have you not always shown that blatant impudence, which is the sole strength of our orators? You push it so far, that you, the head of the State, dare to milk the purses of the opulent aliens and, at sight of you, the son of Hippodamus melts into tears. But here is another man who gives me pleasure, for he is a much greater rascal than you; he will overthrow you; 'tis easy to see, that he will beat you in roguery, in brazenness and in clever turns. Come, you, who have been brought up among the class which to-day gives us all our great men, show us that a liberal education is mere tomfoolery.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Just hear what sort of fellow that fine citizen is.

CLEON

Will you not let me speak?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Assuredly not, for I too am an awful rascal.

DEMOSTHENES

If he does not give in at that, tell him your parents were awful rascals too.

CLEON

Once more, will you let me speak?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, by Zeus!

CLEON

Yes, by Zeus, you shall!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, by Posidon! We will fight first to see who shall speak first.

CLEON

I will die sooner.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will not let you . . .

DEMOSTHENES

Let him, in the name of the gods, let him die.

CLEON

What makes you so bold as to dare to speak to my face?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Because I know both how to speak and how to cook.

CLEON

Hah! the fine speaker! Truly, if some business matter fell your way, you would know thoroughly well how to attack it, to carve it up alive! Shall I tell you what has happened to you? Like so many others, you have gained some petty lawsuit against some alien. Did you drink enough water to inspire you? Did you mutter over the thing sufficiently through the night, spout it along the street, recite it to all you met? Have you bored your friends enough with it? And for this you deem yourself an orator. You poor fool!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And what do you drink yourself then, to be able all alone by yourself to dumbfound and stupefy the city so with your clamour?

CLEON

Can you match me with a rival? Me? When I have devoured a good hot tunny-fish and drunk on top of it a great jar of unmixed wine. I say "to Hell with the generals of Pylos!"

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I, when I have bolted the tripe of an ox together with a sow's belly and swallowed the broth as well, I am fit, though slobbering with grease, to bellow louder than all orators and to terrify Nicias.

DEMOSTHENES

I admire your language so much; the only thing I do not approve is that you swallow all the broth yourself.

CLEON

Even though you gorged yourself on sea-dogs, you would not beat the Milesians.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Give me a bullock's breast to devour, and I am a man to traffic in mines

CLEON

I will rush into the Senate and set them all by the ears.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I will pull out your arse to stuff like a sausage.

CLEON

As for me, I will seize you by the rump and hurl you head foremost through the door.

DEMOSTHENES

By Posidon, only after you have thrown *me* there first.

CLEON

(*Beginning another crescendo of competitive screeching*)

Beware of the carcan!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I denounce you for cowardice.

CLEON

I will tan your hide.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will flay you and make a thief's pouch with the skin.

CLEON

I will peg you out on the ground.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will slice you into mince-meat.

CLEON

I will tear out your eyelashes.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will slit your gullet.

DEMOSTHENES

We will set his mouth open with a wooden stick as the cooks do with pigs; we will tear out his tongue, and, looking down his gaping throat, will see whether his inside has any pimples.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Thus then at Athens we have something more fiery than fire, more impudent than impudence itself! 'Tis a grave matter; come, we will push and jostle him without mercy. There, you grip him tightly un-

der the arms; if he gives way at the onset, you will find him nothing but a craven; I know my man.

DEMOSTHENES

That he has been all his life and he has only made himself a name by reaping another's harvest; and now he has tied up the ears he gathered over there, he lets them dry and seeks to sell them.

CLEON

I do not fear you as long as there is a Senate and a people which stands like a fool, gaping in the air.

CHORUS (*singing*)

What unparalleled impudence! 'Tis ever the same brazen front. If I don't hate you, why, I'm ready to take the place of the one blanket Cratinus wets; I'll offer to play a tragedy by Morsimus. Oh! you cheat! who turn all into money, who flutter from one extortion to another; may you disgorge as quickly as you have crammed yourself! Then only would I sing, "Let us drink, let us drink to this happy event!" Then even the son of Ulius, the old wheat-fairy, would empty his cup with transports of joy, crying, "Io, Paean! Io, Bacchus!"

CLEON

By Posidon! You! would you beat me in impudence! If you succeed, may I no longer have my share of the victims offered to Zeus on the city altar.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I, I swear by the blows that have so oft rained upon my shoulders since infancy, and by the knives that have cut me, that I will show more effrontery than you; as sure as I have rounded this fine stomach by feeding on the pieces of bread that had cleansed other folk's greasy fingers.

CLEON

On pieces of bread, like a dog! Ah! wretch! you have the nature of a dog and you dare to fight a dog-headed ape?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I have many another trick in my sack, memories of my childhood's days. I used to linger around the cooks and say to them, "Look, friends, don't you see a swallow? It's the herald of springtime." And while they stood, their noses in the air, I made off with a piece of meat.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! most clever man! How well thought out! You did as the eaters of artichokes, you gathered them before the return of the swallows.[6]

SAUSAGE-SELLER

They could make nothing of it, or, if they suspected a trick, I hid the meat in my crotch and denied the thing by all the gods; so that an orator, seeing me at the game, cried, "This child will get on; he has the mettle that makes a statesman."

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

He argued rightly; to steal, perjure yourself and make your arse receptive are three essentials for climbing high.

CLEON

I will stop your insolence, or rather the insolence of both of you. I will throw myself upon you like a terrible hurricane ravaging both land and sea at the will of its fury.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Then I will gather up my sausages and entrust myself to the kindly waves of fortune so as to make you all the more enraged.

DEMOSTHENES

And I will watch in the bilges in case the boat should make water.

CLEON

No, by Demeter! I swear, it will not be with impunity that you have thieved so many talents from the Athenians.

DEMOSTHENES (*to the* SAUSAGE-SELLER)

Oh! oh! reef your sail a bit! Here is a Northeaster blowing calumniously.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I know that you got ten talents out of Potidaea.

CLEON

Wait! I will give you one; but keep it dark!

DEMOSTHENES (*aside*)

Hah! that will please him mightily; (*to the* SAUSAGE-SELLER) now you can travel under full sail. The wind has lost its violence.

CLEON

I will bring four suits against you, each of one hundred talents.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I twenty against you for shirking duty and more than a thousand for robbery.

CLEON

I maintain that your parents were guilty of sacrilege against the goddess.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I, that one of your grandfathers was a satellite. . . .

CLEON

To whom? Explain!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

To Byrsina, the mother of Hippias.

CLEON

You are an impostor.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And you are a rogue.

(*He strikes* CLEON *with a sausage.*)

DEMOSTHENES

Hit him hard.

CLEON

Alas! The conspirators are murdering me!

DEMOSTHENES (*to the* SAUSAGE-SELLER)

Hit him! Hit him with all your might! Bruise his belly and lash him with your guts and your tripe! Punish him with both hands!

(CLEON *sinks beneath the blows.*)

CHORUS-LEADER

Oh! vigorous assailant and intrepid heart! See how you have totally routed him in this duel of abuse, so that to us and to the citizens you seem the saviour of the city. How shall I give tongue to my joy and praise you sufficiently?

CLEON (*recovering his wits*)

Ah! by Demeter! I was not ignorant of this plot and these machinations that were being forged and nailed and put together against me.

DEMOSTHENES (*to the* SAUSAGE-SELLER)

Look out, look out! Come, outfence him with some wheelwright slang.[7]

SAUSAGE-SELLER

His tricks at Argos do not escape me. Under pretence of forming an alliance with the Argives, he is hatching a plot with the Lacedæmonians there; and I know why the bellows are blowing and the metal that is on the anvil; it's the question of the prisoners.

DEMOSTHENES

Well done! Forge on, if he be a wheelwright.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And there are men at Sparta who are hammering the iron with you; but neither gold nor silver nor prayers nor anything else shall impede my denouncing your trickery to the Athenians.

CLEON

As for me, I hasten to the Senate to reveal your plotting, your nightly gatherings in the city, your trafficking with the Medes and with the Great King, and all you are foraging for in Boeotia.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What price then is paid for forage by Boeotians?

CLEON

Oh! by Heracles! I will tan your hide.

(*He departs.*)

DEMOSTHENES

Come, if you have both wit and heart, now is the time to show it, as on the day when you hid the meat in your crotch, as you say. Hasten to the Senate, for he will rush there like a tornado to calumniate us all and give vent to his fearful bellowings.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I am going, but first I must rid myself of my tripe and my knives; I will leave them here.

DEMOSTHENES

Stay! rub your neck with lard; in this way you will slip between the fingers of calumny.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Spoken like a finished wrestling coach.

DEMOSTHENES

Now, bolt down these cloves of garlic.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Pray, what for?

DEMOSTHENES

Well primed with garlic, you will have greater mettle for the fight. But hurry, make haste rapidly!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

That's just what I'm doing.

(*He departs.*)

DEMOSTHENES

And, above all, bite your foe, rend him to atoms, tear off his comb and do not return until you have devoured his wattles.

(*He goes into the house of* DEMOS.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Go! make your attack with a light heart, avenge me and may Zeus guard you! I burn to see you return the victor and laden with chaplets of glory. And you, spectators, enlightened critics of all kind of poetry, lend an ear to my anapests. (*The Chorus moves forward and faces the audience.*)

Had one of the old authors asked me to mount this stage to recite his verses, he would not have found it hard to persuade me. But our poet of to-day is likewise worthy of this favour; he shares our hatred, he dares to tell the truth, he boldly braves both waterspouts and hurricanes. Many among you, he tells us, have expressed wonder, that he has not long since had a piece presented in his own name, and have asked the reason why. This is what he bids us say in reply to your questions; it is not without grounds that he has courted the shade, for, in his opinion, nothing is more difficult than to cultivate the comic Muse; many court her, but very few secure her favours. Moreover, he knows that you are fickle by nature and betray your poets when they grow old. What fate befell Magnes, when his hair went white? Often enough had he triumphed over his rivals; he had sung in all keys, played the lyre and fluttered wings; he turned into a Lydian and even into a gnat, daubed himself with green to become a frog. All in vain! When young, you applauded him; in his old age you hooted and mocked him, because his genius for raillery had gone. Cratinus again was like a torrent of glory rushing across the plain, up-rooting oak, plane tree and rivals and bearing them pell-mell in his wake. The only songs at the banquet were, "Doro, shod with lying tales" and "Adepts of the Lyric Muse," so great was his renown. Look at him now! he drivels, his lyre has neither strings nor keys, his voice quivers, but you have no pity for him, and you let him wander about as he can, like Connas, his temples circled

with a withered chaplet; the poor old fellow is dying of thirst; he who, in honour of his glorious past, should be in the Prytaneum drinking at his ease, and instead of trudging the country should be sitting amongst the first row of the spectators, close to the statue of Dionysus and loaded with perfumes. Crates, again, have you done hounding him with your rage and your hisses? True, it was but meagre fare that his sterile Muse could offer you; a few ingenious fancies formed the sole ingredients, but nevertheless he knew how to stand firm and to recover from his falls. It is such examples that frighten our poet; in addition, he would tell himself, that before being a pilot, he must first know how to row, then to keep watch at the prow, after that how to gauge the winds, and that only then would he be able to command his vessel. If then you approve this wise caution and his resolve that he would not bore you with foolish nonsense, raise loud waves of applause in his favour this day, so that, at this Lenaean feast, the breath of your favour may swell the sails of his triumphant galley and the poet may withdraw proud of his success, with head erect and his face beaming with delight.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Posidon, god of the racing steeds, I salute you, you who delight in their neighing and in the resounding clatter of their brass-shod hoofs, god of the swift galleys, which, loaded with mercenaries, cleave the seas with their azure beaks, god of the equestrian contests, in which young rivals, eager for glory, ruin themselves for the sake of distinction with their chariots in the arena, come and direct our chorus; Posidon with the trident of gold, you, who reign over the dolphins, who are worshipped at Sunium and at Geraestus beloved of Phormio and dear to the whole city above all the immortals, I salute you!

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Let us sing the glory of our forefathers, ever victors, both on land and sea, they merit that Athens, rendered famous by these, her worthy sons, should write their deeds upon the sacred peplus. As soon as they saw the enemy, they at once sprang at him without ever counting his strength. Should one of them fall in the conflict he would shake off the dust, deny his mishap and begin the struggle anew. Not one of these generals of old time would have asked Cleaenetus to be fed at the cost of the State; but our present men refuse to fight, unless they get the honours of the Prytaneum and precedence in their seats. As for us, we place our valour gratuitously at the service of Athens and of her gods; our only hope is that, should peace ever put a term to our toils, you will not grudge us our long, scented hair nor our delicate care for our toilet.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! Pallas, guardian of Athens, you, who reign over the most pious city, the most powerful, the richest in warriors and in poets, hasten to my call, bringing in your train our faithful ally in all our expeditions and combats, Victory, who smiles on our choruses and fights with us against our rivals. Oh! goddess! manifest yourself to our sight; this day more than ever we deserve that you should ensure our triumph.

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

We will sing likewise the exploits of our steeds! they are worthy of our praises; in what invasions, what fights have I not seen them helping us! But especially admirable were they, when they bravely leapt upon the galleys, taking nothing with them but a coarse wine, some cloves of garlic and onions; despite this, they nevertheless seized the sweeps just like men, curved their backs over the thwarts and shouted, "*Hippapai!* Give way! Come, all pull together! Come, come! How! Samphoras! Are you not rowing?" They rushed down upon the coast of Corinth, and the youngest hollowed out beds in the sand with their hoofs or went to fetch coverings; instead of luzern, they had no food but crabs, which they caught on the strand and even in the sea; so that Theorus causes a Corinthian crab to say, " 'Tis a cruel fate, oh Posidon neither my deep hiding-places, whether on land or at sea, can help me to escape the Knights."

(*The* SAUSAGE-SELLER *returns.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Welcome, oh, dearest and bravest of men! How distracted I have been during your absence! But here you are back, safe and sound. Tell us about the fight you have had

SAUSAGE-SELLER

The important thing is that I have beaten the Senate.

CHORUS (*singing*)

All glory to you! Let us burst into shouts of joy! You speak well, but your deeds are even better. Come, tell me everything in detail, what a long journey would I not be ready to take to hear your tale! Come, dear friend, speak with full confidence to your admirers.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

The story is worth hearing. Listen! From here I rushed straight to the Senate, right in the track of this man; he was already letting loose the storm, unchaining the lightning, crushing the Knights beneath huge mountains of calumnies heaped together and having all the air of truth, he called you conspirators and his lies caught root like weeds in every

mind; dark were the looks on every side and brows were knitted. When I saw that the Senate listened to him favourably and was being tricked by his imposture I said to myself, "Come, gods of rascals and braggarts, gods of all fools, and toad-eaters, and thou too, oh market-place, wherein I was bred from my earliest days, give me unbridled audacity, an untiring chatter and a shameless voice." No sooner had I ended this prayer than a pederast farted on my right.[8] "Hah! a good omen," said I, and prostrated myself; then I burst open the door by a vigorous push with my arse, and, opening my mouth to the utmost, shouted, "Senators, I wanted you to be the first to hear the good news; since the war broke out, I have never seen anchovies at a lower price!" All faces brightened at once and I was voted a chaplet [9] for my good tidings; and I added, "With a couple of words I will reveal to you how you can have quantities of anchovies for an obol; all you have to do is to seize on all the dishes the merchants have." With mouths gaping with admiration, they applauded me. However, the Paphlagonian winded the matter and, well knowing the sort of language which pleases the Senate best, said, "Friends, I am resolved to offer one hundred oxen to the goddess in recognition of this happy event." The Senate at once veered to his side. So when I saw myself defeated by this ox dung, I outbade the fellow, crying, "Two hundred!" And beyond this I moved that a vow be made to Diana of a thousand goats if the next day anchovies should only be worth an obol a hundred. And the Senate looked towards me again. The other, stunned with the blow, grew delirious in his speech, and at last the Prytanes and the Scythians dragged him out. The Senators then stood talking noisily about the anchovies. Cleon, however, begged them to listen to the Lacedaemonian envoy, who had come to make proposals of peace; but all with one accord cried "Certainly it's not the moment to think of peace now! If anchovies are so cheap, what need have we of peace? Let the war take its course!" And with loud shouts they demanded that the Prytanes should close the sitting and then they leapt over the rails in all directions. As for me, I slipped away to buy all the coriander seed and leeks there were on the market and gave it to them gratis as seasoning for their anchovies. It was marvellous! They loaded me with praises and caresses; thus I conquered the Senate with an obol's worth of leeks, and here I am.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Bravo! you are the spoilt child of Fortune. Ah! our knave has found his match in another, who has far better tricks in his sack, a thousand kinds of knaveries and of wily words. But the fight begins afresh; take care not to weaken; you know that I have long been your most faithful ally.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Ah! ah! here comes the Paphlagonian! One would say it was a hurricane lashing the sea and rolling the waves before it in its fury. He looks as if he wanted to swallow me up alive! Ye gods! what an impudent knave!

CLEON (*as he rushes in*)

To my aid, my beloved lies! I am going to destroy you, or my name is lost.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Oh! how he diverts me with his threats! His bluster makes me laugh! And I dance the *mothon* for joy, and sing at the top of my voice, cuckoo!

CLEON

Ah! by Demeter! if I do not kill and devour you, may I die!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

If you do not devour me? and I, if I do not drink your blood to the last drop, and then burst with indigestion.

CLEON

I, I will strangle you, I swear it by the front seat which Pylos gained me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

By the front seat! Ah! might I see you fall into the hindmost seat!

CLEON

By heaven! I will put you to the torture.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What a lively wit! Come, what's the best to give you to eat? What do you prefer? A purse?

CLEON

I will tear out your insides with my nails.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I will cut off your victuals at the Prytaneum.

CLEON

I will haul you before Demos, who will mete out justice to you.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I too will drag you before him and belch forth more calumnies than you.

CLEON

Why, poor fool, he does not believe you, whereas I play with him at will.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Is then Demos your property, your contemptible creature?

CLEON

It's because I know the dishes that please him.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And these are little mouthfuls, which you serve to him like a clever nurse. You chew the pieces and place some in small quantities in his mouth, while you swallow three parts yourself.

CLEON

Thanks to my skill, I know exactly how to enlarge or contract this gullet.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

My arse is just as clever.

CLEON

Well, my friend, you tricked me at the Senate, but take care! Let us go before Demos.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

That's easily done; come, let's do it right away.

CLEON (*loudly*)

Oh, Demos! Come, I adjure you to help me, my father!

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*more loudly*)

Come, oh, my dear little Demos, come and see how I am insulted.

DEMOS (*coming out of his house followed by* DEMOSTHENES)

What a hubhub! To the Devil with you, bawlers! Alas! my olive branch, which they have torn down! [10] Ah! it's you, Paphlagonian. And who, pray, has been maltreating you?

CLEON

You are the cause of this man and these young people having covered me with blows.

DEMOS

And why?

CLEON

Because you love me passionately, Demos.

DEMOS (*to the* SAUSAGE-SELLER)

And you, who are you?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

His rival. For many a long year have I loved you, have I wished to do you honour, I and a crowd of other men of means. But this rascal here has prevented us. You resemble those young men who do not know where to choose their lovers; you repulse honest folks; to earn your favours. one has to be a lamp-seller, a cobbler, a tanner or a currier.

CLEON

I am the benefactor of the people.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

In what way, please?

CLEON

In what way? I supplanted the Generals at Pylos, I hurried thither and I brought back the Laconian captives.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I, whilst simply loitering, cleared off with a pot from a shop, which another fellow had been boiling.

CLEON

Demos, convene the assembly at once to decide which of us two loves you best and most merits your favour.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Yes, yes, provided it be not at the Pnyx.

DEMOS

I could not sit elsewhere; it is at the Pnyx that you must appear before me.

(*He sits down on a stone in the Orchestra.*)

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Ah! great gods! I am undone! At home this old fellow is the most sensible of men, but the instant he is seated on those cursed stone seats, he is there with mouth agape as if he were hanging up figs by their stems to dry.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Come, loose all sail. Be bold, skilful in attack and entangle him in arguments which admit of no reply. It is difficult to beat him, for he

is full of craft and pulls himself out of the worst corners. Collect all your forces to come forth from this fight covered with glory.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But take care! Let him not assume the attack, get ready your grapples and advance with your vessel to board him!

CLEON

Oh! guardian goddess of our city! oh! Athené if it be true that next to Lysicles, Cynna and Salabaccho none have done so much good for the Athenian people as I, suffer me to continue to be fed at the Prytaneum without working; but if I hate you, if I am not ready to fight in your defence alone and against all, may I perish, be sawn to bits alive and my skin cut up into thongs.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I, Demos, if it be not true, that I love and cherish you, may I be cooked in a stew; and if that is not saying enough, may I be grated on this table with some cheese and then hashed, may a hook be passed through my balls and let me be dragged thus to the Ceramicus!

CLEON

Is it possible, Demos, to love you more than I do? And firstly, as long as you have governed with my consent, have I not filled your treasury, putting pressure on some, torturing others or begging of them, indifferent to the opinion of private individuals, and solely anxious to please you?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

There is nothing so wonderful in all that, Demos; I will do as much; I will thieve the bread of others to serve up to you. No, he has neither love for you nor kindly feeling; his only care is to warm himself with your wood, and I will prove it. You, who, sword in hand, saved Attica from the Median yoke at Marathon; you, whose glorious triumphs we love to extol unceasingly, look, he cares little whether he sees you seated uncomfortably upon a stone; whereas I, I bring you this cushion, which I have sewn with my own hands. Rise and try this nice soft seat. Did you not put enough strain on your bottom at Salamis?

(*He gives* DEMOS *the cushion;* DEMOS *sits on it.*)

DEMOS

Who are you then? Can you be of the race of Harmodius? Upon my faith, that is nobly done and like a true friend of Demos.

CLEON

Petty flattery to prove him your goodwill!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

But you have caught him with even smaller baits!

CLEON

Never had Demos a defender or a friend more devoted than myself; on my head, on my life, I swear it!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

You pretend to love him and for eight years you have seen him housed in casks, in crevices and dovecots,[11] where he is blinded with the smoke, and you lock him in without pity; Archeptolemus brought peace and you tore it to ribbons; the envoys who come to propose a truce you drive from the city with kicks in their arses.

CLEON

The purpose of this is that Demos may rule over all the Greeks; for the oracles predict that, if he is patient, he must one day sit as judge in Arcadia at five obols per day. Meanwhile, I will nourish him, look after him and, above all, I will ensure to him his three obols.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, little you care for his reigning in Arcadia, it's to pillage and impose on the allies at will that you reckon; you wish the war to conceal your rogueries as in a mist, that Demos may see nothing of them, and harassed by cares, may only depend on yourself for his bread. But if ever peace is restored to him, if ever he returns to his lands to comfort himself once more with good cakes, to greet his cherished olives, he will know the blessings you have kept him out of, even though paying him a salary; and, filled with hatred and rage, he will rise, burning with desire to vote against you. You know this only too well; it is for this you rock him to sleep with your lies.

CLEON

Is it not shameful, that you should dare thus to calumniate me before Demos, me, to whom Athens, I swear it by Demeter, already owes more than it ever did to Themistocles?

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*declaiming*)

Oh! citizens of Argos, do you hear what he says? (*to* CLEON) You dare to compare yourself to Themistocles, who found our city half empty and left it full to overflowing, who one day gave us the Piraeus for dinner, and added fresh fish to all our usual meals. You, on the contrary, you, who compare yourself with Themistocles, have only sought to reduce our city in size, to shut it within its walls, to chant oracles to us. And Themistocles goes into exile, while you gorge yourself on the most excellent fare.

CLEON

Oh! Demos! Am I compelled to hear myself thus abused, and merely because I love you?

DEMOS

Silence! stop your abuse! All too long have I been your dupe.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Ah! my dear little Demos, he is a rogue who has played you many a scurvy trick; when your back is turned, he taps at the root the lawsuits initiated by the peculators, swallows the proceeds wholesale and helps himself with both hands from the public funds.

CLEON

Tremble, knave; I will convict you of having stolen thirty thousand drachmae.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

For a rascal of your kidney, you shout rarely! Well! I am ready to die if I do not prove that you have accepted more than forty minae from the Mitylenaeans.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

This indeed may be termed talking. Oh, benefactor of the human race, proceed and you will be the most illustrious of the Greeks. You alone shall have sway in Athens, the allies will obey you, and, trident in hand, you will go about shaking and overturning everything to enrich yourself. But, stick to your man, let him not go; with lungs like yours you will soon have him finished.

CLEON

No, my brave friends, no, you are running too fast; I have done a sufficiently brilliant deed to shut the mouth of all enemies, so long as one of the bucklers of Pylos remains.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Of the bucklers! Hold! I stop you there and I hold you fast. For if it be true that you love the people, you would not allow these to be hung up with their rings;[12] but it's with an intent you have done this. Demos, take knowledge of his guilty purpose; in this way you no longer can punish him at your pleasure. Note the swarm of young tanners, who really surround him, and close to them the sellers of honey and cheese; all these are at one with him. Very well! you have but to frown, to speak of ostracism and they will rush at night to these bucklers, take them down and seize our granaries.

DEMOS

Great gods! what! the bucklers retain their rings! Scoundrel! ah! too long have you had me for your dupe, cheated and played with me!

CLEON

But, dear sir, never you believe all he tells you. Oh! never will you find a more devoted friend than me; unaided, I have known how to put down the conspiracies; nothing that is hatching in the city escapes me, and I hasten to proclaim it loudly.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

You are like the fishers for eels; in still waters they catch nothing, but if they thoroughly stir up the slime, their fishing is good; in the same way it's only in troublous times that you line your pockets. But come, tell me, you, who sell so many skins, have you ever made him a present of a pair of soles for his slippers? and you pretend to love him!

DEMOS

No, he has never given me any.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

That alone shows up the man; but I, I have bought you this pair of shoes; accept them.

(*He gives* DEMOS *the shoes;* DEMOS *puts them on.*)

DEMOS

None ever, to my knowledge, has merited so much from the people; you are the most zealous of all men for your country and for my toes.

CLEON

Can a wretched pair of slippers make you forget all that you owe me? Is it not I who curbed the pederasts by erasing Gryttus' name from the lists of citizens?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Ah! noble Inspector of Arses, let me congratulate you. Moreover, if you set yourself against this form of lewdness, this pederasty, it was for sheer jealousy, knowing it to be the school for orators. But you see this poor Demos without a cloak and that at his age too! so little do you care for him, that in mid-winter you have not given him a garment with sleeves. Here, Demos, here is one, take it!

(*He gives* DEMOS *a cloak;* DEMOS *puts it on.*)

DEMOS

This even Themistocles never thought of; the Piraeus was no doubt a happy idea, but I think this tunic is quite as fine an invention.

CLEON

Must you have recourse to such jackanapes' tricks to supplant me?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, it's your own tricks that I am borrowing, just as a drunken guest, when he has to take a crap, seizes some other man's shoes.

CLEON

Oh! you shall not outdo me in flattery! I am going to hand Demos this garment; all that remains to you, you rogue, is to go and hang yourself.

DEMOS (*as* CLEON *throws a cloak around his shoulders*)

Faugh! may the plague seize you! You stink of leather horribly.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Why, it's to smother you that he has thrown this cloak around you on top of the other; and it is not the first plot he has planned against you. Do you remember the time when silphium was so cheap?

DEMOS

Aye, to be sure I do!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Very well! it was Cleon who had caused the price to fall so low, that all might eat it, and the jurymen in the Courts were almost asphyxiated from farting in each others' faces.

DEMOS

Hah! why, indeed, a Dungtownite told me the same thing.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Were you not yourself in those days quite red in the gills with farting?

DEMOS

Why, it was a trick worthy of Pyrrhandrus!

CLEON

With what other idle trash will you seek to ruin me, you wretch!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Oh! I shall be more brazen than you, for it's the goddess who has commanded me.

CLEON

No, on my honour, you will not! Here, Demos, feast on this dish; it is your salary as a dicast, which you gain through me for doing naught.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Wait! here is a little box of ointment to rub into the sores on your legs.

CLEON

I will pluck out your white hairs and make you young again.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Take this hare's tail to wipe the rheum from your eyes.

CLEON

When you wipe your nose, clean your fingers on my head.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, on mine.

CLEON

On *mine*. (*To the* SAUSAGE-SELLER) I will have you made a trierarch and you will get ruined through it; I will arrange that you are given an old vessel with rotten sails, which you will have to repair constantly and at great cost.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Our man is on the boil; enough, enough, he is boiling over; remove some of the embers from under him and skim off his threats.

CLEON

I will punish your self-importance, I will crush you with imposts; I will have you inscribed on the list of the rich.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

For me no threats—only one simple wish. That you may be having some cuttle-fish fried on the stove just as you are going to set forth to plead the cause of the Milesians, which, if you gain it, means a talent in your pocket; that you hurry over devouring the fish to rush off to the Assembly; suddenly you are called and run off with your mouth full so as not to lose the talent and choke yourself. There! that is my wish.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Splendid! by Zeus, Apollo and Demeter!

DEMOS

Faith! here is an excellent citizen indeed, such as has not been seen for a long time. He's truly a man of the lowest scum! As for you, Paphlagonian, who pretend to love me, you only feed me on garlic. Return me my ring, for you cease to be my steward.

CLEON

Here it is, but be assured, that if you bereave me of my power, my successor will be worse than I am.

DEMOS

This cannot be my ring, I see another device, unless I am going purblind.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What was your device?

DEMOS

A fig-leaf, stuffed with bullock's fat.[13]

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, that is not it.

DEMOS

What is it then?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

It's a gull with beak wide open, haranguing the people from the top of a stone.

DEMOS

Ah! great gods!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What is the matter?

DEMOS

Away! away out of my sight! It's not my ring he had, it was that of Cleonymus. (*To the* SAUSAGE-SELLER) Wait, I'll give you this one; you shall be my steward.

CLEON

Master, I adjure you, decide nothing till you have heard my oracles.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And mine.

CLEON

If you believe him, you will have to prostitute yourself for him.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

If you listen to him, you'll have to let him peel you to the very stump.

CLEON

My oracles say that you are to reign over the whole earth, crowned with chaplets.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And mine say that, clothed in an embroidered purple robe, you shall pursue Smicythé and her spouse, standing in a chariot of gold and with a crown on your head

DEMOS

Go, fetch me your oracles, that the Paphlagonian may hear them.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Willingly.

DEMOS

And you yours.

CLEON

I'll run.

(*He rushes into the house of* DEMOS.)

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I'll run too; nothing could suit me better!

(*He departs in haste.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! happy day for us and for our children if Cleon perish. Yet just now I heard some old cross-grained pleaders on the market-place who hold not this opinion discoursing together. Said they, "If Cleon had not had the power, we should have lacked two most useful tools, the pestle and the soup-ladle." [14] You also know what a pig's education he has had; his school-fellows can recall that he only liked the Dorian style and would study no other; his music-master in displeasure sent him away, saying; "This youth, in matters of harmony, will only learn the Dorian style because it is akin to bribery." [15]

CLEON (*coming out of the house with a large package*)

There, look at this heap; and yet I'm not bringing them all.

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*entering with an even larger package*)

Ugh! The weight of them is squeezing the crap right out of me, and still I'm not bringing them all!

DEMOS

What are these?

CLEON

Oracles.

DEMOS

All these?

CLEON

Does that astonish you? Why, I have another whole boxful of them.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I the whole of my attic and two rooms besides.

DEMOS

Come, let us see, whose are these oracles?

CLEON

Mine are those of Bacis.

DEMOS (*to the* SAUSAGE-SELLER)

And whose are yours?

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*without hesitating*)

Glanis's, the elder brother of Bacis.

DEMOS

And of what do they speak?

CLEON

Of Athens and Pylos and you and me and everything.

DEMOS

And yours?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Of Athens and lentils and Lacedæmonians and fresh mackerel and scoundrelly flour-sellers and you and me. Ah! ha! now watch him gnaw his own tool with chagrin!

DEMOS

Come, read them out to me and especially that one I like so much, which says that I shall become an eagle and soar among the clouds.

CLEON

Then listen and be attentive! "Son of Erechtheus, understand the meaning of the words, which the sacred tripods set resounding in the

sanctuary of Apollo. Preserve the sacred dog with the jagged teeth, that barks and howls in your defence; he will ensure you a salary and, if he fails, will perish as the victim of the swarms of jays that hunt him down with their screams."

DEMOS

By Demeter! I do not understand a word of it. What connection is there between Erechtheus, the jays and the dog?

CLEON

I am the dog, since I bark in your defence. Well! Phoebus commands you to keep and cherish your dog.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

That is not what the god says; this dog seems to me to gnaw at the oracles as others gnaw at doorposts. Here is exactly what Apollo says of the dog.

DEMOS

Let us hear, but I must first pick up a stone; an oracle which speaks of a dog might bite my tool.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

"Son of Erechtheus, beware of this Cerberus that enslaves free men; he fawns upon you with his tail when you are dining, but he is lying in wait to devour your dishes should you turn your head an instant; at night he sneaks into the kitchen and, true dog that he is, licks up with one lap of his tongue both your dishes and . . . the islands."

DEMOS

By god, Glanis, you speak better than your brother.

CLEON

Condescend again to hear *me* and then judge: "A woman in sacred Athens will be delivered of a lion, who shall fight for the people against clouds of gnats with the same ferocity as if he were defending his whelps; care ye for him, erect wooden walls around him and towers of brass." Do you understand that?

DEMOS

Not the least bit in the world.

CLEON

The god tells you here to look after me, for I am your lion.

DEMOS

How! You have become a lion and I never knew a thing about it?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

There is only one thing which he purposely keeps from you; he does not say what this wall of wood and brass is in which Apollo warns you to keep and guard him.

DEMOS

What does the god mean, then?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

He advises you to fit him into a five-holed wooden collar.

DEMOS

Hah! I think that oracle is about to be fulfilled.

CLEON

Do not believe it; these are but jealous crows, that caw against me; but never cease to cherish your good hawk; never forget that he brought you those Lacedaemonian fish, loaded with chains.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Ah! if the Paphlagonian ran any risk that day, it was because he was drunk. Oh, too credulous son of Cecrops, do you accept that as a glorious exploit? A woman would carry a heavy burden if only a man had put it on her shoulders. But to fight! Go to! he would empty his bowels before he would ever fight.

CLEON

Note this Pylos in front of Pylos, of which the oracle speaks, "Pylos is before Pylos."

DEMOS

How "in front of Pylos"? What does he mean by that?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

He says he will seize upon your bath-tubs.[16]

DEMOS

Then I shall not bathe to-day.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, as he has stolen our baths. But here is an oracle about the fleet, to which I beg your best attention.

DEMOS

Read on! I am listening; let us first see how we are to pay our sailors.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

"Son of Ægeus, beware of the tricks of the dog-fox, he bites from the rear and rushes off at full speed; he is nothing but cunning and perfidy." Do you know what the oracle intends to say?

DEMOS

The dog-fox is Philostratus.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, no, it's Cleon; he is incessantly asking you for light vessels to go and collect the tributes, and Apollo advises you not to grant them.

DEMOS

What connection is there between a galley and dog-fox?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

What connection? Why, it's quite plain—a galley travels as fast as a dog.

DEMOS

Why, then, does the oracle not say dog instead of dog-fox?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Because he compares the soldiers to young foxes, who, like them, eat the grapes in the fields.

DEMOS

Good! Well then! how am I to pay the wages of my young foxes?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will undertake that, and in three days too! But listen to this further oracle, by which Apollo puts you on your guard against the snares of the greedy fist.

DEMOS

Of what greedy fist?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

The god in this oracle very clearly points to the hand of Cleon, who incessantly holds his out, saying, "Fill it."

CLEON

That's a lie! Phoebus means the hand of Diopithes. But here I have a winged oracle, which promises you shall become an eagle and rule over all the earth.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I have one, which says that you shall be King of the Earth and of the Red Sea too, and that you shall administer justice in Ecbatana, eating fine rich stews the while.

CLEON

I have seen Athené in a dream, pouring out full vials of riches and health over the people.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I too have seen the goddess, descending from the Acropolis with an owl perched upon her helmet; on your head she was pouring out ambrosia, on that of Cleon garlic pickle.

DEMOS

Truly Glanis is the wisest of men. I shall yield myself to you; guide me in my old age and educate me anew.

CLEON

Ah! I adjure you! not yet; wait a little; I will promise to distribute barley every day.

DEMOS

Ah! I will not hear another word about barley; you have cheated me too often already, both you and Theophanes.

CLEON

Well then! you shall have flour-cakes all piping hot.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will give you cakes too, and nice cooked fish; all you'll have to do is eat.

DEMOS

Very well, mind you keep your promises. To whichever of you shall treat me best I hand over the reins of state.

CLEON

I will be first.

(*He rushes into the house.*)

SAUSAGE-SELLER

No, no, *I* will.

(*He runs off.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Demos, you are our all-powerful sovereign lord; all tremble before you, yet you are led by the nose. You love to be flattered and fooled; you listen to the orators with gaping mouth and your mind is led astray.

DEMOS (*singing*)

It's rather you who have no brains, if you think me so foolish as all that; it is with a purpose that I play this idiot's rôle, for I love to drink the livelong day, and so it pleases me to keep a thief for my minister. When he has thoroughly gorged himself, then I overthrow and crush him.

CHORUS (*singing*)

What profound wisdom! If it be really so, why! all is for the best. Your ministers, then, are your victims, whom you nourish and feed up expressly in the Pnyx, so that, the day your dinner is ready, you may immolate the fattest and eat him.

DEMOS (*singing*)

Look, see how I play with them, while all the time they think themselves such adepts at cheating me. I have my eye on them when they thieve, but I do not appear to be seeing them; then I thrust a judgment down their throat as it were a feather, and force them to vomit up all they have robbed from me.

(*Cleon comes out of the house with a bench and a large basket; at the same moment the* SAUSAGE-SELLER *arrives with another basket; the two are placed beside one another.*)

CLEON

Get out of here!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Get out yourself!

CLEON

Demos, all is ready these three hours; I await your orders and I burn with desire to load you with benefits.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I ten, twelve, a thousand hours, a long, long while, an infinitely long, long, long while.

DEMOS

As for me, it's thirty thousand hours that I have been impatient; very long, infinitely long, long, long that I have cursed you.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Do you know what you had best do?

DEMOS

I will, if you tell me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Declare the lists open and we will contend abreast to determine who shall treat you the best.

DEMOS

Splendid! Draw back in line!

CLEON

I am ready.

DEMOS

Off you go!

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*to* CLEON)

I shall not let you get to the tape.

DEMOS

What fervent lovers! If I am not to-day the happiest of men, it will be because I am the most disgusted.

CLEON (*putting down the bench for* DEMOS)

Look! I am the first to bring you a seat.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And I a table.

(*He places his sausage-tray in front of* DEMOS.)

CLEON

Wait, here is a cake kneaded of Pylos barley.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Here are crusts, which the ivory hand of the goddess has hallowed.

DEMOS

Oh! Mighty Athené! How large are your fingers!

CLEON

This is pea-soup, as exquisite as it is fine; Pallas the victorious goddess at Pylos is the one who crushed the peas herself.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Oh, Demos! the goddess watches over you; she is stretching forth over your head . . . a stew-pan full of broth.

DEMOS

And should we still be dwelling in this city without this protecting stew-pan?

CLEON

Here are some fish, given to you by her who is the terror of our foes.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

The daughter of the mightiest of the gods sends you this meat cooked in its own gravy, along with this dish of tripe and some paunch.

DEMOS

That's to thank me for the peplus I offered to her; good.

CLEON

The goddess with the terrible plume invites you to eat this long cake; you will row the harder on it.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Take this also.

DEMOS

And what shall I do with this tripe?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

She sends it you to belly out your galleys, for she is always showing her kindly anxiety for our fleet. Now drink this drink composed of three parts of water to two of wine.

DEMOS

Ah! what delicious wine, and how well it stands the water.[17]

SAUSAGE-SELLER

The goddess who came from the head of Zeus mixed this liquor with her own hands.

CLEON

Hold, here is a piece of good rich cake.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

But I offer you an entire cake.

CLEON

But you cannot offer him stewed hare as I do.

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*aside*)

Ah! great gods! stewed hare! where shall I find it? Oh! brain of mine, devise some trick!

CLEON (*showing him the hare*)

Do you see this, you rogue?

SAUSAGE-SELLER (*pretending to look afar*)

A fig for that! Here are some people coming to seek me. They are envoys, bearing sacks bulging with money.

CLEON

(*Hearing money mentioned* CLEON *turns his head, and the* SAUSAGE-SELLER *seizes the opportunity to snatch away the stewed hare.*)

Where, where, I say?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Bah! What's that to you? Will you not even now let the strangers alone? Dear Demos, do you see this stewed hare which I bring you?

CLEON

Ah! rascal! you have shamelessly robbed me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

You have robbed too, you robbed the Laconians at Pylos.

DEMOS

Please tell me, how did you get the idea to filch it from him?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

The idea comes from the goddess; the theft is all my own.

CLEON

And I had taken such trouble to catch this hare and I was the one who had it cooked.

DEMOS (*to* CLEON)

Get you gone! My thanks are only for him who served it.

CLEON

Ah! wretch! you have beaten me in impudence!

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Well then, Demos, say now, who has treated you best, you and your stomach? Decide!

DEMOS

How shall I act here so that the spectators shall approve my judgment?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I will tell you. Without saying anything, go and rummage through my basket, and then through the Paphlagonian's, and see what is in them; that's the best way to judge.

DEMOS

Let us see then, what is there in yours?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Why, it's empty, dear little father; I have brought everything to you.

DEMOS

This is a basket devoted to the people.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Now hunt through the Paphlagonian's. (*Pause, as Demos does so*) Well?

DEMOS

Oh! what a lot of good things! Why it's quite full! Oh! what a huge great part of this cake he kept for himself! He had only cut off the least little tiny piece for me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

But this is what he has always done. Of everything he took, he only gave you the crumbs, and kept the bulk.

DEMOS (*to* CLEON)

Oh! rascal! was this the way you robbed me? And I was loading you with chaplets and gifts!

CLEON

I robbed for the public weal.

DEMOS (*to* CLEON)

Give me back that crown; I shall give it to him.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Return it quick, quick, you gallows-bird.

CLEON

No, for the Pythian oracle has revealed to me the name of him who shall overthrow me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

And that name was mine, nothing can be clearer.

CLEON

Reply and I shall soon see whether you are indeed the man whom the god intended. Firstly, what school did you attend when a child?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

It was in the kitchens, where I was taught with cuffs and blows.

CLEON

What's that you say? (*aside*) Ah! this is truly what the oracle said. (*To the* SAUSAGE-SELLER) And what did you learn from the master of exercises?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I learnt to take a false oath without a smile, when I had stolen something.

CLEON (*frightened; aside*)

Oh! Phoebus Apollo, god of Lycia! I am undone! (*To the* SAUSAGE-SELLER) And when you had become a man, what trade did you follow?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

I sold sausages and did a bit of fornication.

CLEON (*in consternation; aside*)

Oh! my god! I am a lost man! Ah! still one slender hope remains. (*to the* SAUSAGE-SELLER) Tell me, was it on the market-place or near the gates that you sold your sausages?

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Near the gates, in the market for salted goods.

CLEON (*in tragic despair*)

Alas! I see the prophecy of the god is verily come true. Alas! roll me home I am a miserable ruined man. Farewell, my chaplet. 'Tis death to me to part with you. So you are to belong to another; 'tis certain he cannot be a greater thief, but perhaps he may be a luckier one.

(*He gives the chaplet to the* SAUSAGE-SELLER.)

SAUSAGE-SELLER

Oh! Zeus, protector of Greece! 'tis to you I owe this victory!

DEMOSTHENES

Hail! illustrious conqueror, but forget not, that if you have become a great man, 'tis thanks to me; I ask but a little thing; appoint me secretary of the law-court in the room of Phanus.

DEMOS (*to the* SAUSAGE-SELLER)

But what is your name then? Tell me.

SAUSAGE-SELLER

My name is Agoracritus, because I have always lived on the market-place in the midst of lawsuits.

DEMOS

Well then, Agoracritus, I stand by you; as for the Paphlagonian, I hand him over to your mercy.

AGORACRITUS

Demos, I will care for you to the best of my power, and all shall admit that no citizen is more devoted than I to this city of simpletons.

(*They all enter the house of* DEMOS.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

What fitter theme for our Muse, at the close as at the beginning of our work, than this, to sing the hero who drives his swift steeds down the arena? Why afflict Lysistratus with our satires on his poverty, and Thumantis, who has not so much as a lodging? He is dying of hunger and can be seen at Delphi, his face bathed in tears, clinging to your quiver, oh, Apollo! and supplicating you to take him out of his misery.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

An insult directed at the wicked is not to be censured; on the contrary, the honest man, if he has sense, can only applaud. Him, whom I wish to brand with infamy, is little known himself; he's the brother of Arignotus. I regret to quote this name which is so dear to me, but whoever can distinguish black from white, or the Orthian mode of music from others, knows the virtues of Arignotus, whom his brother, Ariphrades, in no way resembles. He gloats in vice, is not merely a dissolute man and utterly debauched—but he has actually invented a new form of vice; for he pollutes his tongue with abominable pleasures in brothels, befouling all of his body.[18] Whoever is not horrified at such a monster shall never drink from the same cup with me.

CHORUS (*singing*)

At times a thought weighs on me at night; I wonder whence comes this fearful voracity of Cleonymus. 'Tis said that when dining with a rich host, he springs at the dishes with the gluttony of a wild beast and never leaves the bread-bin until his host seizes him round the knees, exclaiming, "Go, go, good gentleman, in mercy go, and spare my poor table!"

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It is said that the triremes assembled in council and that the oldest spoke in these terms, "Are you ignorant, my sisters, of what is plotting in Athens? They say that a certain Hyperbolus, a bad citizen and an infamous scoundrel, asks for a hundred of us to take them to sea against Carthage." All were indignant, and one of them, as yet a virgin, cried, "May god forbid that I should ever obey him! I would prefer to grow old in the harbour and be gnawed by worms. No! by the gods I swear it, Nauphanté, daughter of Nauson, shall never bend to his law; that's as true as I am made of wood and pitch. If the Athenians vote for the proposal of Hyperbolus, let them! we will hoist full sail and seek refuge by the temple of Theseus or the shrine of the Eumenides. No! he shall not command us! No! he shall not play with the city to this extent! Let him sail by himself for Tartarus, if such please him, launching the boats in which he used to sell his lamps."

(*The* SAUSAGE-SELLER *comes out of the house of* DEMOS, *splendidly robed.*)

AGORACRITUS (*solemnly*)

Maintain a holy silence! Keep your mouths from utterance! call no more witnesses; close these tribunals, which are the delight of this city, and gather at the theatre to chant the Paean of thanksgiving to the gods for a fresh favour.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! torch of sacred Athens, saviour of the Islands, what good tidings are we to celebrate by letting the blood of the victims flow in our market-places?

AGORACRITUS

I have freshened Demos up somewhat on the stove and have turned his ugliness into beauty.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I admire your inventive genius; but, where is he?

AGORACRITUS

He is living in ancient Athens, the city of the garlands of violets.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

How I should like to see him! What is his dress like, what his manner?

AGORACRITUS

He has once more become as he was in the days when he lived with Aristides and Miltiades. But you will judge for yourselves, for I hear the

vestibule doors opening. Hail with your shouts of gladness the Athens of old, which now doth reappear to your gaze, admirable, worthy of the songs of the poets and the home of the illustrious Demos.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! noble, brilliant Athens, whose brow is wreathed with violets, show us the sovereign master of this land and of all Greece.

(DEMOS *comes from his house, rejuvenated and joyous.*)

AGORACRITUS

Lo! here he is coming with his hair held in place with a golden band and in all the glory of his old-world dress; perfumed with myrrh, he spreads around him not the odour of lawsuits, but that of peace.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hail! King of Greece, we congratulate you upon the happiness you enjoy; it is worthy of this city, worthy of the glory of Marathon.

DEMOS

Come, Agoracritus, come, my best friend; see the service you have done me by freshening me up on your stove.

AGORACRITUS

Ah! if you but remembered what you were formerly and what you did, you would for a certainty believe me to be a god.

DEMOS

But what did I do? and how was I then?

AGORACRITUS

Firstly, so soon as ever an orator declared in the Assembly, "Demos, I love you ardently; it is I alone who dream of you and watch over your interests"; at such an exordium you would look like a cock flapping his wings or a bull tossing his horns.

DEMOS

What, I?

AGORACRITUS

Then, after he had fooled you to the hilt, he would go.

DEMOS

What! they would treat me so, and I never saw it?

AGORACRITUS

You knew only how to open and close your ears like a sunshade.

DEMOS

Was I then so stupid and such a dotard?

AGORACRITUS

Worse than that; if one of two orators proposed to equip a fleet for war and the other suggested the use of the same sum for paying out to the citizens, it was the latter who always carried the day. Well! you droop your head! Why do you turn away your face?

DEMOS

I am blushing at my past errors.

AGORACRITUS

Think no more of them; it's not you who are to blame, but those who cheated you in this sorry fashion. But, come, if some impudent lawyer dared to say, "Dicasts, you shall have no wheat unless you convict this accused man!" what would you do? Tell me.

DEMOS

I would have him removed from the bar, I would bind Hyperbolus about his neck like a stone and would fling him into the Barathrum.

AGORACRITUS

Well spoken! but what other measures do you wish to take?

DEMOS

First, as soon as ever a fleet returns to the harbour, I shall pay up the rowers in full.

AGORACRITUS

That will soothe many a worn and chafed bottom.

DEMOS

Further, the hoplite enrolled for military service shall not get transferred to another service through favour, but shall stick to that given him at the outset.

AGORACRITUS

This will strike the buckler of Cleonymus full in the centre.

DEMOS

None shall ascend the rostrum, unless his chin is bearded.

AGORACRITUS

What then will become of Clisthenes and of Strato?

DEMOS

I wish only to refer to those youths who loll about the perfume shops, babbling at random, "What a clever fellow is Phaeax! How cleverly he escaped death! how concise and convincing is his style! what phrases! how clear and to the point! how well he knows how to quell an interruption!"

AGORACRITUS

I thought you were the lover of those fairies.

DEMOS

The gods forefend it! and I will force all such fellows to go hunting instead of proposing decrees.

AGORACRITUS

In that case, accept this folding-stool, and, to carry it, this well-grown, big-balled slave lad. Besides, you may put him to any other purpose you please.

DEMOS

Oh! I am happy indeed to find myself as I was of old!

AGORACRITUS

Aye, you will deem yourself happy, when I have handed you the truce of thirty years. Truce! step forward!

(*Enter Truce, in the form of a beautiful young girl, magnificently attired.*)

DEMOS

Great gods! how charming she is! Can I do with her as I wish? where did you discover her, pray?

AGORACRITUS

That Paphlagonian had kept her locked up in his house, so that you might not enjoy her. As for myself, I give her to you; take her with you into the country.

DEMOS

And what punishment will you inflict upon this Paphlagonian, the cause of all my troubles?

AGORACRITUS

It will not be over-terrible. I condemn him to follow my old trade; posted near the gates, he must sell sausages of asses' and dogs' meat; perpetually drunk, he will exchange foul language with prostitutes and will drink nothing but the dirty water from the baths.

DEMOS

Well conceived! he is indeed fit to wrangle with harlots and bathmen; as for you, in return for so many blessings, I invite you to take the place at the Prytaneum which this rogue once occupied. Put on his frog-green mantle and follow me. As for the other, let them take him away; let him go sell his sausages in full view of the foreigners, whom he used formerly to insult so wantonly.

1. Aristophanes never tires of twitting Euripides with the fact or fancy that his mother had sold vegetables.

2. Eucrates: see the Glossary.

3. Lysicles: see the Glossary.

4. The same actor played the parts of both Nicias and Cleon; hence Nicias does not reappear in the comedy.

5. The cavalry had been responsible for an Athenian victory at Corinth in 425.

6. Artichokes were tenderest in early spring

7. In order to endear themselves to the masses, the demagogues were wont to vulgarize their oratory with terms derived from various trades.

8. Thunder on the right was a favourable omen.

9. The Athenians had three ways of signifying their gratitude to persons who had served the state outstandingly well. They might grant: 1) The privilege of dining in the Prytaneum; 2) A chaplet or garland, the ancient equivalent of a medal of honour; 3) A front seat in the theatre.

10. In the Pyanepsian procession the children carried olive branches around which were wound strips of linen. After the festival these were hung up over the doors of the houses. Modern superstition exhibits analogous actions on Palm Sunday.

11. In the early years of the Peloponnesian War the Spartans invaded Attica almost every year, and the rural population was forced to move into the city, where they were very inadequately housed.

12. When bucklers were hung up as trophies it was usual to detach the ring or brace, in order to render them useless for military purposes.

13. There is a pun here on the Greek words *démos,* "people" and *demós,* "fat."

14. The implication of this remark is that Cleon is so adept at crushing and overturning the fortunes of Athens that he is to be credited with the invention of the utensils with which these operations are culinarily performed.

15. Aristophanes has here coined the word *Dorodokisti,* which is patterned after *Doristi,* "in the Dorian mode," with the added suggestion of

dorodokos, "taker of bribes." Following the lead of a French translator, we might speak of the "louis d'or-ian mode."

16. The Greek word for bath-tub was *pyelos.*

17. The ancients regularly diluted their wine with a more or less generous admixture of water.

18. The original here contains, and the translation omits, a number of details on the new form of vice. Only a pedant would demand their inclusion, for like many other parts of this play they are totally deficient in humour. Cunnilingual activities are not particularly new nowadays anyway, and our psychologists will inform the curious more thoroughly and more reliably than Aristophanes.

III
THE CLOUDS

Characters in the Play

Strepsiades
Phidippides
Servant of Strepsiades
Disciples of Socrates
Socrates
Just Discourse
Unjust Discourse
Pasias, *a Money-lender*
Amynias, *another Money-lender*
Chorus of Clouds

INTRODUCTION

THE consecutive successes of *The Acharnians* and *The Knights* in 425 and 424 had filled Aristophanes with pride and bereft him of judgment, and at the Great Dionysia of 423 he expectantly produced what he misguidedly considered his best comedy, *The Clouds*. The award of the third and lowest prize was a disappointment at once bitter and salutary; if the poet never quite forgave the Athenian populace for its eminently just verdict, he at least did not again endeavour to create comedy out of intellectual backwardness and none of his later plays is so lacking in levity or so fettered with message.

The piece opens with a soliloquy by Strepsiades, an old and stupid rustic for whom Aristophanes shows traces of an affection difficult to comprehend and impossible to share. Deeply in debt because of the extravagance of his horse-racing son Phidippides and sleepless with worry over what to do, he finally decides to call in the aid of the new science by which Sophists enable their pupils to confute their creditors and preserve their fortunes. When his request that Phidippides learn this useful art is summarily rejected Strepsiades resolves to study it himself and goes over to the Thoughtery, the house of Socrates, which is next door to his own. Here he finds the disciples of the Sophist engaged in a number of ridiculous travesties on scientific investigation and soon the Master himself appears, suspended in a basket and "contémplating the sun."

Strepsiades begs to be accepted as a pupil and swears to pay whatever sum Socrates may name. The mention of the gods leads Socrates to expound the truth about celestial matters, and the Clouds, the genii of his school, are invoked with prayers and praises. In this way the poet motivates the entrance of the Chorus and prepares for the scene that follows, in which the new learning is repeatedly and sharply lampooned. Finally Socrates accepts Strepsiades as a pupil and both of them enter the Thoughtery, leaving the stage to the Chorus, which now delivers the parabasis.

The anapests take the Athenians to task for their unappreciative reception of the play, and here for the first time we realize that we are reading a later version of *The Clouds* and not necessarily the one which Aris-

tophanes produced in 423. There is, however, no reason to believe that any essential or extensive changes were made; the poet was too stubbornly fond of the play for that, and we may therefore conclude that what we possess is the reading version published by the author after the production, and probably altered only in the parabasis. The ode is a prayer to Zeus, Posidon, and Apollo. The epirrheme recounts the services of the Clouds to Athens. The antode invokes Apollo, Artemis, Athené, and Dionysus. The antepirrheme reports the Moon's good wishes for Athens, but also her annoyance at the inadequacy of the Athenian calendar.

At the conclusion of the parabasis Socrates comes out of his Thoughtery infuriated at the stupidity of Strepsiades but gallantly resolved not to abandon his attempt to teach him. He decides to continue his efforts in the fresh air, and the spectators are given several samples of the old man's ineptitude. This finally exhausts even Socrates' patience and he leaves in disgust. The Chorus counsels Strepsiades to have his son educated in his stead, and Phidippides this time yields with unexpected and inconsistent readiness.

Socrates decides to have him instructed by none other than the Just and the Unjust Discourses themselves, and soon these worthies appear and engage in a lengthy argument in which the former nostalgically portrays the virtues of olden times and the latter expounds the utility of the modern science. The contest ends with the complete defeat of the Just Discourse, and his triumphant opponent takes over the education of Phidippides and leads him into the Thoughtery. The Chorus ominously voices the opinion that Strepsiades will regret this, and then sings a brief ode in which the power of the Clouds is extolled. At the conclusion of this Socrates appears and presents Strepsiades with his made-over son, now very pale and intellectual looking. The old man takes him home exultantly and is able, even without the scientific assistance of his son, to get rid of two creditors in short order. The Chorus sings a reflective ode, suggestive of those which precede the catastrophe in many tragedies, and immediately Strepsiades runs out of his house, hotly pursued by his ungrateful son, who has beaten his father and now proves that he has been morally quite justified in so doing; he is also willing to demonstrate that he would have a right to inflict the same treatment on his mother, but Strepsiades now perceives what the poet evidently regards as the light and realizing that it is the insidious science of Socrates that has brought him these troubles, he and a slave set fire to the little house in which these subversive studies are pursued.

Such is the plot of the comedy which Aristophanes thought worthy of the highest prize. Our judgment on this question is hampered by the fact that we do not possess the plays which were ranked above it, but we may safely assume that unless they were exceptionally poor, *The Clouds* re-

ceived just what it deserved. It is not a good comedy for a number of reasons and a recital of these is hardly necessary here. Its chief defect, however, lies in its central character, the Aristophanic Socrates. To be amusing, a caricature must strongly resemble its original in all important essentials. These will be grossly exaggerated, to be sure, but to be funny they must be true. If Adolf Hitler were married it might be amusing to portray him as a hen-pecked husband, but no one in his senses would expect an audience to be entertained by such a picture now. Yet Socrates rejected the natural science of his day; refused to organize any school of philosophy; never took pay for his teaching, which he gave gratis to anyone who would discuss ethics or metaphysics with him; made no claims to omniscience, but affected rather to know nothing. In all these respects the character which Aristophanes put on the stage in *The Clouds* is an inept caricature, but it is more flagrantly so in the most important point of all, for no man in Athens was more devoted to truth, honesty, justice, and morality than was Socrates. The irritating dialectician of the market-place must have been a familiar figure to almost every member of the poet's audience, yet the fact that they rejected the Aristophanic Socrates testifies little to their love for the real one and a great deal to their love for good caricatures.

THE CLOUDS

(SCENE:—*In the background are two houses, that of Strepsiades and that of Socrates, the Thoughtery. The latter is small and dingy; the interior of the former is shown and two beds are seen, each occupied.*)

STREPSIADES (*sitting up*)

GREAT gods! will these nights never end? will daylight never come? I heard the cock crow long ago and my slaves are snoring still! Ah! it wasn't like this formerly. Curses on the war! has it not done me ills enough? Now I may not even chastise my own slaves.[1] Again there's this brave lad, who never wakes the whole long night, but, wrapped in his five coverlets, farts away to his heart's content. (*He lies down*) Come! let me nestle in well and snore too, if it be possible . . . oh! misery, it's vain to think of sleep with all these expenses, this stable, these debts, which are devouring me, thanks to this fine cavalier, who only knows how to look after his long locks, to show himself off in his chariot and to dream of horses! And I, I am nearly dead, when I see the moon bringing the third decade in her train and my liability falling due. . . . Slave! light the lamp and bring me my tablets. (*The slave obeys.*) Who are all my creditors? Let me see and reckon up the interest. What is it I owe? . . . Twelve minæ to Pasias. . . . What! twelve minæ to Pasias? . . . Why did I borrow these? Ah! I know! It was to buy that thoroughbred, which cost me so much. How I should have prized the stone that had blinded him!

PHIDIPPIDES (*in his sleep*)

That's not fair, Philo! Drive your chariot straight, I say.

STREPSIADES

This is what is destroying me. He raves about horses, even in his sleep.

PHIDIPPIDES (*still sleeping*)

How many times round the track is the race for the chariots of war?

STREPSIADES

It's your own father you are driving . . . to death . . . to ruin. Come! what debt comes next, after that of Pasias? . . . Three minæ to Amynias for a chariot and its two wheels.

PHIDIPPIDES (*still asleep*)

Give the horse a good roll in the dust and lead him home.

STREPSIADES

Ah! wretched boy! it's my money that you are making roll. My creditors have distrained on my goods, and here are others again, who demand security for their interest.

PHIDIPPIDES (*awaking*)

What is the matter with you, father, that you groan and turn about the whole night through?

STREPSIADES

I have a bum-bailiff in the bedclothes biting me.

PHIDIPPIDES

For pity's sake, let me have a little sleep. (*He turns over.*)

STREPSIADES

Very well, sleep on! but remember that all these debts will fall back on your shoulders. Oh! curses on the go-between who made me marry your mother! I lived so happily in the country, a commonplace, everyday life, but a good and easy one—had not a trouble, not a care, was rich in bees, in sheep and in olives. Then indeed I had to marry the niece of Megacles, the son of Megacles; I belonged to the country, she was from the town; she was a haughty, extravagant woman, a true Coesyra. On the nuptial day, when I lay beside her, I was reeking of the dregs of the wine-cup, of cheese and of wool; she was redolent with essences, saffron, voluptuous kisses, the love of spending, of good cheer and of wanton delights. I will not say she did nothing; no, she worked hard . . . to ruin me, and pretending all the while merely to be showing her the cloak she had woven for me, I said, "Wife you go too fast about your work, your threads are too closely woven and you use far too much wool."

(*A slave enters with a lamp.*)

SLAVE

There is no more oil in the lamp.

STREPSIADES

Why then did you light such a thirsty lamp? Come here, I am going to beat you.

SLAVE

What for?

STREPSIADES

Because you have put in too thick a wick. . . . Later, when we had this boy, what was to be his name? It was the cause of much quarrelling with my loving wife. She insisted on having some reference to a horse in his name, that he should be called Xanthippus, Charippus or Callippides.[2] I wanted to name him Phidonides after his grandfather. We disputed long, and finally agreed to style him Phidippides. . . . She used to fondle and coax him, saying, "Oh! what a joy it will be to me when you have grown up, to see you, like my father, Megacles, clothed in purple and standing up straight in your chariot driving your steeds toward the town." And I would say to him, "When, like your father, you will go, dressed in a skin, to fetch back your goats from Phelleus." Alas! he never listened to me and his madness for horses has shattered my fortune. (*He gets out of bed.*) But by dint of thinking the livelong night, I have discovered a road to salvation, both miraculous and divine. If he will but follow it, I shall be out of my trouble! First, however, he must be awakened, but it must be done as gently as possible. How shall I manage it? Phidippides! my little Phidippides!

PHIDIPPIDES (*awaking again*)

What is it, father?

STREPSIADES

Kiss me and give me your hand.

PHIDIPPIDES (*getting up and doing as his father requests*)

There! What's it all about?

STREPSIADES

Tell me! do you love me?

PHIDIPPIDES

By Posidon, the equestrian Posidon! yes, I swear I do.

STREPSIADES

Oh, do not, I pray you, invoke this god of horses; he is the one who is the cause of all my cares. But if you really love me, and with your whole heart, my boy, believe me.

PHIDIPPIDES

Believe you? about what?

STREPSIADES

Alter your habits forthwith and go and learn what I tell you.

PHIDIPPIDES

Say on, what are your orders?

STREPSIADES

Will you obey me ever so little?

PHIDIPPIDES

By Bacchus, I will obey you.

STREPSIADES

Very well then! Look this way. Do you see that little door and that little house?

PHIDIPPIDES

Yes, father. But what are you driving at?

STREPSIADES

That is the Thoughtery of wise souls. There they prove that we are coals enclosed on all sides under a vast snuffer, which is the sky. If well paid, these men also teach one how to gain law-suits, whether they be just or not.

PHIDIPPIDES

What do they call themselves?

STREPSIADES

I do not know exactly, but they are deep thinkers and most admirable people.

PHIDIPPIDES

Bah! the wretches! I know them; you mean those quacks with pale faces, those barefoot fellows, such as that miserable Socrates and Chaerephon?

STREPSIADES

Silence! say nothing foolish! If you desire your father not to die of hunger, join their company and let your horses go.

PHIDIPPIDES

No, by Bacchus! even though you gave me the pheasants that Leogoras raises.

STREPSIADES

Oh! my beloved son, I beseech you, go and follow their teachings.

PHIDIPPIDES

And what is it I should learn?

STREPSIADES

It seems they have two courses of reasoning, the true and the false, and that, thanks to the false, the worst law-suits can be gained. If then you learn this science, which is false, I shall not have to pay an obolus of all the debts I have contracted on your account.

PHIDIPPIDES

No, I will not do it. I should no longer dare to look at our gallant horsemen, when I had so ruined my tan.

STREPSIADES

Well then, by Demeter! I will no longer support you, neither you, nor your team, nor your saddle-horse. Go and hang yourself, I turn you out of house and home.

PHIDIPPIDES

My uncle Megacles will not leave me without horses; I shall go to him and laugh at your anger.

(*He departs.* STREPSIADES *goes over to* SOCRATES' *house.*)

STREPSIADES

One rebuff shall not dishearten me. With the help of the gods I will enter the Thoughtery and learn myself. (*He hesitates.*) But at my age, memory has gone and the mind is slow to grasp things. How can all these fine distinctions, these subtleties be learned? (*Making up his mind*) Bah! why should I dally thus instead of rapping at the door? Slave, slave!

(*He knocks and calls.*)

A DISCIPLE (*from within*)

A plague on you! Who are you?

STREPSIADES

Strepsiades, the son of Phido, of the deme of Cicynna.

DISCIPLE (*coming out of the door*)

You are nothing but an ignorant and illiterate fellow to let fly at the door with such kicks. You have brought on a miscarriage—of an idea!

STREPSIADES

Pardon me, please; for I live far away from here in the country. But tell me, what was the idea that miscarried?

DISCIPLE

I may not tell it to any but a disciple.

STREPSIADES

Then tell me without fear, for I have come to study among you.

DISCIPLE

Very well then, but reflect, that these are mysteries. Lately, a flea bit Chaerephon on the brow and then from there sprang on to the head of Socrates. Socrates asked Chaerephon, "How many times the length of its legs does a flea jump?"

STREPSIADES

And how ever did he go about measuring it?

DISCIPLE

Oh! it was most ingenious! He melted some wax, seized the flea and dipped its two feet in the wax, which, when cooled, left them shod with true Persian slippers. These he took off and with them measured the distance.

STREPSIADES

Ah! great Zeus! what a brain! what subtlety!

DISCIPLE

I wonder what then would you say, if you knew another of Socrates' contrivances?

STREPSIADES

What is it? Pray tell me.

DISCIPLE

Chaerephon of the deme of Sphettia asked him whether he thought a gnat buzzed through its proboscis or through its anus.

STREPSIADES

And what did he say about the gnat?

DISCIPLE

He said that the gut of the gnat was narrow, and that, in passing through this tiny passage, the air is driven with force towards the breech; then after this slender channel, it encountered the rump, which was distended like a trumpet, and there it resounded sonorously.

STREPSIADES

So the arse of a gnat is a trumpet. Oh! what a splendid arsevation! [3] Thrice happy Socrates! It would not be difficult to succeed in a law-suit, knowing so much about a gnat's guts!

DISCIPLE

Not long ago a lizard caused him the loss of a sublime thought.

STREPSIADES

In what way, please?

DISCIPLE

One night, when he was studying the course of the moon and its revolutions and was gazing open-mouthed at the heavens, a lizard crapped upon him from the top of the roof.

STREPSIADES

A lizard crapping on Socrates! That's rich!

DISCIPLE

Last night we had nothing to eat.

STREPSIADES

Well, what did he contrive, to secure you some supper?

DISCIPLE

He spread over the table a light layer of cinders, bending an iron rod the while; then he took up a pair of compasses and at the same moment unhooked a piece of the victim which was hanging in the palaestra.

STREPSIADES

And we still dare to admire Thales! Open, open this home of knowledge to me quickly! Haste, haste to show me Socrates; I long to become his disciple. But do please open the door. (*The door opens, revealing the interior of the Thoughtery, in which the* DISCIPLES OF SOCRATES *are seen in various postures of meditation and study; they are pale and emaciated creatures.*) Ah! by Heracles! what country are those animals from?

DISCIPLE

Why, what are you astonished at? What do you think they resemble?

STREPSIADES

The captives of Pylos. But why do they look so fixedly on the ground?

DISCIPLE

They are seeking for what is below the ground.

STREPSIADES

Ah! they're looking for onions. Do not give yourselves so much trouble; I know where there are some, fine big ones. But what are those fellows doing, bent all double?

DISCIPLE

They are sounding the abysses of Tartarus.

STREPSIADES

And what are their arses looking at in the heavens?

DISCIPLE

They are studying astronomy on their own account. But come in so that the master may not find us here.

STREPSIADES

Not yet; not yet; let them not change their position. I want to tell them my own little matter.

DISCIPLE

But they may not stay too long in the open air and away from school.

STREPSIADES (*pointing to a celestial globe*)

In the name of all the gods, what is that? Tell me.

DISCIPLE

That is astronomy.

STREPSIADES (*pointing to a map*)

And that?

DISCIPLE

Geometry.

STREPSIADES

What is that used for?

DISCIPLE

To measure the land.

STREPSIADES

But that is apportioned by lot.

DISCIPLE

No, no, I mean the entire earth.

STREPSIADES

Ah! what a funny thing! How generally useful indeed is this invention!

DISCIPLE

There is the whole surface of the earth. Look! Here is Athens.

STREPSIADES

Athens! you are mistaken; I see no courts in session.

DISCIPLE

Nevertheless it is really and truly the Attic territory.

STREPSIADES

And where are my neighbours of Cicynna?

DISCIPLE

They live here. This is Euboea; you see this island, that is so long and narrow.

STREPSIADES

I know. Because we and Pericles have stretched it by dint of squeezing it. And where is Lacedaemon?

DISCIPLE

Lacedaemon? Why, here it is, look.

STREPSIADES

How near it is to us! Think it well over, it must be removed to a greater distance.

DISCIPLE

But, by Zeus, that is not possible.

STREPSIADES

Then, woe to you! and who is this man suspended up in a basket?

DISCIPLE

That's *himself.*

STREPSIADES

Who's himself?

DISCIPLE

Socrates.

STREPSIADES

Socrates! Oh! I pray you, call him right loudly for me.

DISCIPLE

Call him yourself; I have no time to waste. (*He departs. The machine swings in* SOCRATES *in a basket.*)

STREPSIADES

Socrates! my little Socrates!

SOCRATES (*loftily*)

Mortal, what do you want with me?

STREPSIADES

First, what are you doing up there? Tell me, I beseech you.

SOCRATES (*pompously*)

I am traversing the air and contémplating the sun.

STREPSIADES

Thus it's not on the solid ground, but from the height of this basket, that you slight the gods, if indeed . . .

SOCRATES

I have to suspend my brain and mingle the subtle essence of my mind with this air, which is of the like nature, in order clearly to penetrate the things of heaven. I should have discovered nothing, had I remained on the ground to consider from below the things that are above; for the earth by its force attracts the sap of the mind to itself. It's just the same with the water-cress.

STREPSIADES

What? Does the mind attract the sap of the water-cress? Ah! my dear little Socrates, come down to me! I have come to ask you for lessons.

SOCRATES (*descending*)

And for what lessons?

STREPSIADES

I want to learn how to speak. I have borrowed money, and my merciless creditors do not leave me a moment's peace; all my goods are at stake.

SOCRATES

And how was it you did not see that you were getting so much into debt?

STREPSIADES

My ruin has been the madness for horses, a most rapacious evil; but teach me one of your two methods of reasoning, the one whose object is not to repay anything, and, may the gods bear witness, that I am ready to pay any fee you may name.

SOCRATES

By which gods will you swear? To begin with, the gods are not a coin current with us.

STREPSIADES

But what do you swear by then? By the iron money of Byzantium?

SOCRATES

Do you really wish to know the truth of celestial matters?

STREPSIADES

Why, yes, if it's possible.

SOCRATES

. . . and to converse with the clouds, who are our genii?

STREPSIADES

Without a doubt.

SOCRATES

Then be seated on this sacred couch.

STREPSIADES (*sitting down*)

I am seated.

SOCRATES

Now take this chaplet.

STREPSIADES

Why a chaplet? Alas! Socrates, would you sacrifice me, like Athamas?

SOCRATES

No, these are the rites of initiation.

STREPSIADES

And what is it I am to gain?

SOCRATES

You will become a thorough rattle-pate, a hardened old stager, the fine flour of the talkers. . . . But come, keep quiet.

STREPSIADES

By Zeus! That's no lie! Soon I shall be nothing but wheat-flour, if you powder me in that fashion.[4]

SOCRATES

Silence, old man, give heed to the prayers. (*In an hierophantic tone*) Oh! most mighty king, the boundless air, that keepest the earth suspended in space, thou bright Aether and ye venerable goddesses, the Clouds, who carry in your loins the thunder and the lightning, arise, ye sovereign powers and manifest yourselves in the celestial spheres to the eyes of your sage.

STREPSIADES

Not yet! Wait a bit, till I fold my mantle double, so as not to get wet. And to think that I did not even bring my travelling cap! What a misfortune!

SOCRATES (*ignoring this*)

Come, oh! Clouds, whom I adore, come and show yourselves to this man, whether you be resting on the sacred summits of Olympus, crowned with hoar-frost, or tarrying in the gardens of Ocean, your father, forming sacred choruses with the Nymphs; whether you be gathering the waves of the Nile in golden vases or dwelling in the Mæotic marsh or on the snowy rocks of Mimas, hearken to my prayer and accept my offering. May these sacrifices be pleasing to you.

(*Amidst rumblings of thunder the* CHORUS OF CLOUDS *appears.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Eternal Clouds, let us appear; let us arise from the roaring depths of Ocean, our father; let us fly towards the lofty mountains, spread our damp wings over their forest-laden summits, whence we will dominate the distant valleys, the harvest fed by the sacred earth, the murmur of the divine streams and the resounding waves of the sea, which the unwearying orb lights up with its glittering beams. But let us shake off the rainy fogs, which hide our immortal beauty and sweep the earth from afar with our gaze.

SOCRATES

Oh, venerated goddesses, yes, you are answering my call! (*To* STREPSIADES.) Did you hear their voices mingling with the awful growling of the thunder?

STREPSIADES

Oh! adorable Clouds, I revere you and I too am going to let off *my* thunder, so greatly has your own affrighted me. (*He farts.*) Faith! whether permitted or not, I must, I *must* crap!

SOCRATES

No scoffing; do not copy those damned comic poets. Come, silence! a numerous host of goddesses approaches with songs.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Virgins, who pour forth the rains, let us move toward Attica, the rich country of Pallas, the home of the brave; let us visit the dear land of Cecrops, where the secret rites are celebrated, where the mysterious sanctuary flies open to the initiate. . . . What victims are offered there to the deities of heaven! What glorious temples! What

statues! What holy prayers to the rulers of Olympus! At every season nothing but sacred festivals, garlanded victims, is to be seen. Then Spring brings round again the joyous feasts of Dionysus, the harmonious contests of the choruses and the serious melodies of the flute.

STREPSIADES

By Zeus! Tell me, Socrates, I pray you, who are these women, whose language is so solemn; can they be demi-goddesses?

SOCRATES

Not at all. They are the Clouds of heaven, great goddesses for the lazy; to them we owe all, thoughts, speeches, trickery, roguery, boasting, lies, sagacity.

STREPSIADES

Ah! that was why, as I listened to them, my mind spread out its wings; it burns to babble about trifles, to maintain worthless arguments, to voice its petty reasons, to contradict, to tease some opponent. But are they not going to show themselves? I should like to see them, were it possible.

SOCRATES

Well, look this way in the direction of Parnes; I already see those who are slowly descending.

STREPSIADES

But where, where? Show them to me.

SOCRATES

They are advancing in a throng, following an oblique path across the dales and thickets.

STREPSIADES

Strange! I can see nothing.

SOCRATES

There, close to the entrance.

STREPSIADES

Hardly, if at all, can I distinguish them.

SOCRATES

You *must* see them clearly now, unless your eyes are filled with gum as thick as pumpkins.

STREPSIADES

Aye, undoubtedly! Oh! the venerable goddesses! Why, they fill up the entire stage.

SOCRATES

And you did not know, you never suspected, that they were goddesses?

STREPSIADES

No, indeed; I thought the Clouds were only fog, dew and vapour.

SOCRATES

But what you certainly do not know is that they are the support of a crowd of quacks, the diviners, who were sent to Thurium, the notorious physicians, the well-combed fops, who load their fingers with rings down to the nails, and the braggarts, who write dithyrambic verses, all these are idlers whom the Clouds provide a living for, because they sing them in their verses.

STREPSIADES

It is then for this that they praise "the rapid flight of the moist clouds, which veil the brightness of day" and "the waving locks of the hundred-headed Typho" and "the impetuous tempests, which float through the heavens, like birds of prey with aerial wings loaded with mists" and "the rains, the dew, which the clouds outpour." As a reward for these fine phrases they bolt well-grown, tasty mullet and delicate thrushes.

SOCRATES

Yes, thanks to these. And is it not right and meet?

STREPSIADES

Tell me then why, if these really are the Clouds, they so very much resemble mortals. This is not their usual form.

SOCRATES

What are they like then?

STREPSIADES

I don't know exactly; well, they are like great packs of wool, but not like women—no, not in the least. . . . And these have noses.

SOCRATES

Answer my questions.

STREPSIADES

Willingly! Go on, I am listening.

SOCRATES

Have you not sometimes seen clouds in the sky like a centaur, a leopard, a wolf or a bull?

STREPSIADES

Why, certainly I have, but what of that?

SOCRATES

They take what metamorphosis they like. If they see a debauchee with long flowing locks and hairy as a beast, like the son of Xenophantes, they take the form of a Centaur in derision of his shameful passion.

STREPSIADES

And when they see Simon, that thiever of public money, what do they do then?

SOCRATES

To picture him to the life, they turn at once into wolves.

STREPSIADES

So that was why yesterday, when they saw Cleonymus, who cast away his buckler because he is the veriest poltroon amongst men, they changed into deer.

SOCRATES

And to-day they have seen Clisthenes; you see . . . they are women.

STREPSIADES

Hail, sovereign goddesses, and if ever you have let your celestial voice be heard by mortal ears, speak to me, oh! speak to me, ye all-powerful queens.

CHORUS-LEADER

Hail! veteran of the ancient times, you who burn to instruct yourself in fine language. And you, great high-priest of subtle nonsense, tell us your desire. To you and Prodicus alone of all the hollow orationers of to-day have we lent an ear—to Prodicus, because of his knowledge and his great wisdom, and to you, because you walk with head erect, a confident look, barefooted, resigned to everything and proud of our protection.

STREPSIADES

Oh! Earth! What august utterances! how sacred! how wondrous!

SOCRATES

That is because these are the only goddesses; all the rest are pure myth.

STREPSIADES

But by the Earth! is our father, Zeus, the Olympian, not a god?

SOCRATES

Zeus! what Zeus! Are you mad? There is no Zeus.

STREPSIADES

What are you saying now? Who causes the rain to fall? Answer me that!

SOCRATES

Why, these, and I will prove it. Have you ever seen it raining without clouds? Let Zeus then cause rain with a clear sky and without their presence!

STREPSIADES

By Apollo! that is powerfully argued! For my own part, I always thought it was Zeus pissing into a sieve. But tell me, who is it makes the thunder, which I so much dread?

SOCRATES

These, when they roll one over the other.

STREPSIADES

But how can that be? you most daring among men!

SOCRATES

Being full of water, and forced to move along, they are of necessity precipitated in rain, being fully distended with moisture from the regions where they have been floating; hence they bump each other heavily and burst with great noise.

STREPSIADES

But is it not Zeus who forces them to move?

SOCRATES

Not at all; it's the aerial Whirlwind.

STREPSIADES

The Whirlwind! ah! I did not know that. So Zeus, it seems, has no existence, and its the Whirlwind that reigns in his stead? But you have not yet told me what makes the roll of the thunder?

SOCRATES

Have you not understood me then? I tell you, that the Clouds, when full of rain, bump against one another, and that, being inordinately swollen out, they burst with a great noise.

STREPSIADES

How can you make me credit that?

SOCRATES

Take yourself as an example. When you have heartily gorged on stew at the Panathenæa, you get throes of stomach-ache and then suddenly your belly resounds with prolonged rumbling.

STREPSIADES

Yes, yes, by Apollo! I suffer, I get colic, then the stew sets to rumbling like thunder and finally bursts forth with a terrific noise. At first, it's but a little gurgling *pappax, pappax!* then it increases, *papapappax!* and when I take my crap, why, it's thunder indeed, *papapappax! pappax!! papapappax!!!* just like the clouds.

SOCRATES

Well then, reflect what a noise is produced by your belly, which is but small. Shall not the air, which is boundless, produce these mighty claps of thunder?

STREPSIADES

And this is why the names are so much alike: crap and clap. But tell me this. Whence comes the lightning, the dazzling flame, which at times consumes the man it strikes, at others hardly singes him. Is it not plain, that Zeus is hurling it at the perjurers?

SOCRATES

Out upon the fool! the driveller! he still savours of the golden age! If Zeus strikes at the perjurers, why has he not blasted Simon, Cleonymus and Theorus? Of a surety, greater perjurers cannot exist. No, he strikes his own temple, and Sunium, the promontory of Athens, and the towering oaks. Now, why should he do that? An oak is no perjurer.

STREPSIADES

I cannot tell, but it seems to me well argued. What is the lightning then?

SOCRATES

When a dry wind ascends to the Clouds and gets shut into them, it blows them out like a bladder; finally, being too confined, it bursts them, escapes with fierce violence and a roar to flash into flame by reason of its own impetuosity.

STREPSIADES

Ah, that's just what happened to me one day. It was at the feast of Zeus! I was cooking a sow's belly for my family and I had forgotten to slit it open. It swelled out and, suddenly bursting, discharged itself right into my eyes and burnt my face.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh, mortal, you who desire to instruct yourself in our great wisdom, the Athenians, the Greeks will envy you your good fortune. Only you must have the memory and ardour for study, you must know how to stand the tests, hold your own, go forward without feeling fatigue, caring but little for food, abstaining from wine, gymnastic exercises and other similar follies, in fact, you must believe as every man of intellect should, that the greatest of all blessings is to live and think more clearly than the vulgar herd, to shine in the contests of words.

STREPSIADES

If it be a question of hardiness for labour, of spending whole nights at work, of living sparingly, of fighting my stomach and only eating chick-pease, rest assured, I am as hard as an anvil.

SOCRATES

Henceforward, following our example, you will recognize no other gods but Chaos, the Clouds and the Tongue, these three alone.

STREPSIADES

I would not speak to the others, even if I met them in the street; not a single sacrifice, not a libation, not a grain of incense for them!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Tell us boldly then what you want of us; you cannot fail to succeed, if you honour and revere us and if you are resolved to become a clever man.

STREPSIADES

Oh, sovereign goddesses, it is only a very small favour that I ask of you; grant that I may outdistance all the Greeks by a hundred stadia in the art of speaking.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We grant you this, and henceforward no eloquence shall more often succeed with the people than your own.

STREPSIADES

May the gods shield me from possessing great eloquence! That's not what I want. I want to be able to turn bad law-suits to my own advantage and to slip through the fingers of my creditors.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It shall be as you wish, for your ambitions are modest. Commit yourself fearlessly to our ministers, the sophists.

STREPSIADES

This I will do, for I trust in you. Moreover there is no drawing back, what with these cursed horses and this marriage, which has eaten up my vitals. (*More and more volubly from here to the end of speech*) So let them do with me as they will; I yield my body to them. Come blows, come hunger, thirst, heat or cold, little matters it to me; they may flay me, if I only escape my debts, if only I win the reputation of being a bold rascal, a fine speaker, impudent, shameless, a braggart, and adept at stringing lies, an old stager at quibbles, a complete table of laws, a thorough rattle, a fox to slip through any hole; supple as a leathern strap, slippery as an eel, an artful fellow, a blusterer, a villain; a knave with a hundred faces, cunning, intolerable, a gluttonous dog. With such epithets do I seek to be greeted; on these terms they can treat me as they choose, and, if they wish, by Demeter! they can turn me into sausages and serve me up to the philosophers.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Here have we a bold and well-disposed pupil indeed. When we have taught you, your glory among the mortals will reach even to the skies.

STREPSIADES (*singing*)

Wherein will that profit me?

CHORUS (*singing*)

You will pass your whole life among us and will be the most envied of men.

STREPSIADES (*singing*)

Shall I really ever see such happiness?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Clients will be everlastingly besieging your door in crowds, burning to get at you, to explain their business to you and to consult you about their suits, which, in return for your ability, will bring you in great sums.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But, Socrates, begin the lessons you want to teach this old man; rouse his mind, try the strength of his intelligence.

SOCRATES

Come, tell me the kind of mind you have; it's important that I know this, that I may order my batteries against you in the right fashion.

STREPSIADES

Eh, what! in the name of the gods, are you purposing to assault me then?

SOCRATES

No. I only wish to ask you some questions. Have you any memory?

STREPSIADES

That depends: if anything is owed me, my memory is excellent, but if I owe, alas! I have none whatever.

SOCRATES

Have you a natural gift for speaking?

STREPSIADES

For speaking, no; for cheating, yes.

SOCRATES

How will you be able to learn then?

STREPSIADES

Very easily, have no fear.

SOCRATES

Thus, when I throw forth some philosophical thought anent things celestial, you will seize it in its very flight?

STREPSIADES

Then I am to snap up wisdom much as a dog snaps up a morsel?

SOCRATES (*aside*)

Oh! the ignoramus! the barbarian! (*to* STREPSIADES) I greatly fear, old man, it will be necessary for me to have recourse to blows. Now, let me hear what you do when you are beaten.

STREPSIADES

I receive the blow, then wait a moment, take my witnesses and finally summon my assailant at law.

SOCRATES

Come, take off your cloak.

STREPSIADES

Have I robbed you of anything?

SOCRATES

No, but the usual thing is to enter the school without your cloak.

STREPSIADES

But I have not come here to look for stolen goods.

SOCRATES

Off with it, fool!

STREPSIADES (*He obeys.*)

Tell me, if I prove thoroughly attentive and learn with zeal, which of your disciples shall I resemble, do you think?

SOCRATES

You will be the image of Chaerephon.

STREPSIADES

Ah! unhappy me! Shall I then be only half alive?

SOCRATES

A truce to this chatter! follow me and no more of it.

STREPSIADES

First give me a honey-cake, for to descend down there sets me all a-tremble; it looks like the cave of Trophonius.

SOCRATES

But get in with you! What reason have you for thus dallying at the door?

(*They go into the Thoughtery.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Good luck! you have courage; may you succeed, you, who, though already so advanced in years, wish to instruct your mind with new studies and practise it in wisdom! (*The* CHORUS *turns and faces the Audience.*)

Spectators! By Bacchus, whose servant I am, I will frankly tell you the truth. May I secure both victory and renown as certainly as I hold you for adept critics and as I regard this comedy as my best. I wished to give you the first view of a work, which had cost me much trouble, but which I withdrew, unjustly beaten by unskilful rivals. It is you, oh, enlightened public, for whom I have prepared my piece, that I reproach with this. Nevertheless I shall never willingly cease to seek the approval of the discerning. I have not forgotten the day, when men, whom one is happy to have for an audience, received my Virtuous Young Man and my Pæderast with so much favour in this very place.[5] Then as yet virgin, my Muse had not attained the age for maternity; she had to expose her first-born for another to adopt, and it has since grown up under your generous patronage. Ever since you have as good as sworn me your faithful alliance. Thus, like the Electra of the poets, my comedy has come to seek you to-day,

hoping again to encounter such enlightened spectators. As far away as she can discern her Orestes, she will be able to recognize him by his curly head. And note her modest demeanour! She has not sewn on a piece of hanging leather, thick and reddened at the end, to cause laughter among the children; she does not rail at the bald, neither does she dance the *cordax;* no old man is seen, who, while uttering his lines, batters his questioner with a stick to make his poor jests pass muster. She does not rush upon the scene carrying a torch and screaming, 'Iou! Iou!' No, she relies upon herself and her verses. . . . My value is so well known, that I take no further pride in it. I do not seek to deceive you, by reproducing the same subjects two or three times; I always invent fresh themes to present before you, themes that have no relation to each other and that are all clever. I attacked Cleon to his face and when he was all-powerful; but he has fallen, and now I have no desire to kick him when he is down. My rivals, on the contrary, now that this wretched Hyperbolus has given them the cue, have never ceased setting upon both him and his mother. First Eupolis presented his 'Maricas'; this was simply my 'Knights,' whom this plagiarist had clumsily furbished up again by adding to the piece an old drunken woman, so that she might dance the *cordax.* It was an old idea, taken from Phrynichus, who caused his old hag to be devoured by a monster of the deep. Then Hermippus fell foul of Hyperbolus and now all the others fall upon him and repeat my comparison of the eels. May those who find amusement in their pieces not be pleased with mine, but as for you, who love and applaud my inventions, why, posterity will praise your good taste.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, ruler of Olympus, all-powerful king of the gods, great Zeus, it is thou whom I first invoke; protect this chorus; and thou too, Posidon, whose dread trident upheaves at the will of thy anger both the bowels of the earth and the salty waves of the ocean. I invoke my illustrious father, the divine Aether, the universal sustainer of life, and Phoebus, who, from the summit of his chariot, sets the world aflame with his dazzling rays, Phoebus, a mighty deity amongst the gods and adored amongst mortals.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Most wise spectators, lend us all your attention. Give heed to our just reproaches. There exist no gods to whom this city owes more than it does to us, whom alone you forget. Not a sacrifice, not a libation is there for those who protect you! Have you decreed some mad expedition? Well! we thunder or we fall down in rain. When you chose that enemy of heaven, the Paphlagonian tanner, for a general, we knitted our brow, we caused our wrath to break out; the lightning shot forth, the thunder pealed, the

moon deserted her course and the sun at once veiled his beam threatening no longer to give you light, if Cleon became general. Nevertheless you elected him; it is said, Athens never resolves upon some fatal step but the gods turn these errors into her greatest gain. Do you wish that his election should even now be a success for you? It is a very simple thing to do; condemn this rapacious gull named Cleon for bribery and extortion, fit a wooden collar tight round his neck, and your error will be rectified and the commonweal will at once regain its old prosperity.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Aid me also, Phoebus, god of Delos, who reignest on the cragged peaks of Cynthia; and thou, happy virgin, to whom the Lydian damsels offer pompous sacrifice in a temple of gold; and thou, goddess of our country, Athené, armed with the aegis, the protectress of Athens; and thou, who, surrounded by the bacchants of Delphi; roamest over the rocks of Parnassus shaking the flame of thy resinous torch, thou, Bacchus, the god of revel and joy.

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

As we were preparing to come here, we were hailed by the Moon and were charged to wish joy and happiness both to the Athenians and to their allies; further, she said that she was enraged and that you treated her very shamefully, her, who does not pay you in words alone, but who renders you all real benefits. Firstly, thanks to her, you save at least a drachma each month for lights, for each, as he is leaving home at night, says, "Slave, buy no torches, for the moonlight is beautiful,"—not to name a thousand other benefits. Nevertheless you do not reckon the days correctly and your calendar is naught but confusion. Consequently the gods load her with threats each time they get home and are disappointed of their meal, because the festival has not been kept in the regular order of time. When you should be sacrificing, you are putting to the torture or administering justice. And often, we others, the gods, are fasting in token of mourning for the death of Memnon or Sarpedon, while you are devoting yourselves to joyous libations. It is for this, that last year, when the lot would have invested Hyperbolus with the duty of Amphictyon, we took his crown from him, to teach him that time must be divided according to the phases of the moon.

SOCRATES (*coming out*)

By Respiration, the Breath of Life! By Chaos! By the Air! I have never seen a man so gross, so inept, so stupid, so forgetful. All the little quibbles, which I teach him, he forgets even before he has learnt them. Yet I will not give it up, I will make him come out here into the open air. Where are you, Strepsiades? Come, bring your couch out here.

STREPSIADES (*from within*)

But the bugs will not allow me to bring it.

SOCRATES

Have done with such nonsense! place it there and pay attention.

STREPSIADES (*coming out, with the bed*)

Well, here I am.

SOCRATES

Good! Which science of all those you have never been taught, do you wish to learn first? The measures, the rhythms or the verses?

STREPSIADES

Why, the measures; the flour dealer cheated me out of two *chocnixes* the other day.

SOCRATES

It's not about that I ask you, but which, according to you, is the best measure, the trimeter or the tetrameter?

STREPSIADES

The one I prefer is the semisextarius.[6]

SOCRATES

You talk nonsense, my good fellow.

STREPSIADES

I will wager your tetrameter is the semisextarius.

SOCRATES

Plague seize the dunce and the fool! Come, perchance you will learn the rhythms quicker.

STREPSIADES

Will the rhythms supply me with food?

SOCRATES

First they will help you to be pleasant in company, then to know what is meant by enhoplian rhythm and what by the dactylic.

STREPSIADES

Of the dactyl? I know that quite well.

SOCRATES

What is it then, other than this finger here? [7]

STREPSIADES

Formerly, when a child, I used this one.

SOCRATES

You are as low-minded as you are stupid.

STREPSIADES

But, wretched man, I do not want to learn all this.

SOCRATES

Then what *do* you want to know?

STREPSIADES

Not that, not that, but the art of false reasoning.

SOCRATES

But you must first learn other things. Come, what are the male quadrupeds?

STREPSIADES

Oh! I know the males thoroughly. Do you take me for a fool then? The ram, the buck, the bull, the dog, the pigeon.

SOCRATES

Do you see what you are doing; is not the female pigeon called the same as the male?

STREPSIADES

How else? Come now!

SOCRATES

How else? With you then it's pigeon and pigeon!

STREPSIADES

That's right, by Posidon! but what names do you want me to give them?

SOCRATES

Term the female pigeonnette and the male pigeon.

STREPSIADES

Pigeonnette! hah! by the Air! That's splendid! for that lesson bring out your kneading-trough and I will fill him with flour to the brim.

SOCRATES

There you are wrong again; you make *trough* masculine and it should be feminine.

STREPSIADES

What? if I say, *him,* do I make the *trough* masculine?

SOCRATES

Assuredly! would you not say him for Cleonymus?

STREPSIADES

Well?

SOCRATES

Then trough is of the same gender as Cleonymus?

STREPSIADES

My good man! Cleonymus never had a kneading-trough; he used a round mortar for the purpose. But come, tell me what I *should* say!

SOCRATES

For trough you should say *her* as you would for Sostraté.

STREPSIADES

Her?

SOCRATES

In this manner you make it truly female.

STREPSIADES

That's it! *Her* for trough and *her* for Cleonymus.

SOCRATES

Now I must teach you to distinguish the masculine proper names from those that are feminine.

STREPSIADES

Ah! I know the female names well.

SOCRATES

Name some then.

STREPSIADES

Lysilla, Philinna, Clitagora, Demetria.

SOCRATES

And what are masculine names?

STREPSIADES

They are countless—Philoxenus, Melesias, Amynias.

SOCRATES

But, wretched man, the last two are not masculine.

STREPSIADES

You do not count them as masculine?

SOCRATES

Not at all. If you met Amynias, how would you hail him?

STREPSIADES

How? Why, I should shout, "Hi, there, Amynia!"[8]

SOCRATES

Do you see? it's a female name that you give him.

STREPSIADES

And is it not rightly done, since he refuses military service? But what use is there in learning what we all know?

SOCRATES

You know nothing about it. Come, lie down there.

STREPSIADES

What for?

SOCRATES

Ponder awhile over matters that interest you.

STREPSIADES

Oh! I pray you, not there! but, if I must lie down and ponder, let me lie on the ground.

SOCRATES

That's out of the question. Come! on the couch!

STREPSIADES (*as he lies down*)

What cruel fate! What a torture the bugs will this day put me to! (*Socrates turns aside.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ponder and examine closely, gather your thoughts together, let your mind turn to every side of things; if you meet with a difficulty, spring quickly to some other idea; above all, keep your eyes away from all gentle sleep.

STREPSIADES (*singing*)

Ow, Wow, Wow, Wow is me!

CHORUS (*singing*)

What ails you? why do you cry so?

STREPSIADES

Oh! I am a dead man! Here are these cursed Corinthians [9] advancing upon me from all corners of the couch; they are biting me, they are gnawing at my sides, they are drinking all my blood, they are yanking off my balls, they are digging into my arse, they are killing me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Not so much wailing and clamour, if you please.

STREPSIADES

How can I obey? I have lost my money and my complexion, my blood and my slippers, and to cap my misery, I must keep awake on this couch, when scarce a breath of life is left in me.

(*A brief interval of silence ensues.*)

SOCRATES

Well now! what are you doing? are you reflecting?

STREPSIADES

Yes, by Posidon!

SOCRATES

What about?

STREPSIADES

Whether the bugs will entirely devour me.

SOCRATES

May death seize you, accursed man!

(*He turns aside again.*)

STREPSIADES

Ah! it has already.

SOCRATES

Come, no giving way! Cover up your head; the thing to do is to find an ingenious alternative.

STREPSIADES

An alternative! ah! I only wish one would come to me from within these coverlets!

(*Another interval of silence ensues.*)

SOCRATES

Wait! let us see what our fellow is doing! Ho! you, are you asleep?

STREPSIADES

No, by Apollo!

SOCRATES

Have you got hold of anything?

STREPSIADES

No, nothing whatever.

SOCRATES

Nothing at all?

STREPSIADES

No, nothing except my tool, which I've got in my hand.

SOCRATES

Aren't you going to cover your head immediately and ponder?

STREPSIADES

On what? Come, Socrates, tell me.

SOCRATES

Think first what you want, and then tell me.

STREPSIADES

But I have told you a thousand times what I want. Not to pay any of my creditors.

SOCRATES

Come, wrap yourself up; concentrate your mind, which wanders too lightly; study every detail, scheme and examine thoroughly.

STREPSIADES

Alas! Alas!

SOCRATES

Keep still, and if any notion troubles you, put it quickly aside, then resume it and think over it again.

STREPSIADES

My *dear* little Socrates!

SOCRATES

What is it, old greybeard?

STREPSIADES

I have a scheme for not paying my debts.

SOCRATES

Let us hear it.

STREPSIADES

Tell me, if I purchased a Thessalian witch, I could make the moon descend during the night and shut it, like a mirror, into a round box and there keep it carefully. . . .

SOCRATES

How would you gain by that?

STREPSIADES

How? why, if the moon did not rise, I would have no interest to pay.

SOCRATES

Why so?

STREPSIADES

Because money is lent by the month.

SOCRATES

Good! but I am going to propose another trick to you. If you were condemned to pay five talents, how would you manage to quash that verdict? Tell me.

STREPSIADES

How? how? I don't know, I must think.

SOCRATES

Do you always shut your thoughts within yourself? Let your ideas fly in the air, like a may-bug, tied by the foot with a thread.

STREPSIADES

I have found a very clever way to annul that conviction; you will admit that much yourself.

SOCRATES

What is it?

STREPSIADES

Have you ever seen a beautiful, transparent stone at the druggists', with which you may kindle fire?

SOCRATES

You mean a crystal lens.

STREPSIADES

That's right. Well, now if I placed myself with this stone in the sun and a long way off from the clerk, while he was writing out the conviction, I could make all the wax, upon which the words were written, melt.

SOCRATES

Well thought out, by the Graces!

STREPSIADES

Ah! I am delighted to have annulled the decree that was to cost me five talents.

SOCRATES

Come, take up this next question quickly.

STREPSIADES

Which?

SOCRATES

If, when summoned to court, you were in danger of losing your case for want of witnesses, how would you make the conviction fall upon your opponent?

STREPSIADES

That's very simple and easy.

SOCRATES

Let me hear.

STREPSIADES

This way. If another case had to be pleaded before mine was called, I should run and hang myself.

SOCRATES

You talk rubbish!

STREPSIADES

Not so, by the gods! if I were dead, no action could lie against me.

SOCRATES

You are merely beating the air. Get out! I will give you no more lessons.

STREPSIADES (*imploringly*)

Why not? Oh! Socrates! in the name of the gods!

SOCRATES

But you forget as fast as you learn. Come, what was the thing I taught you first? Tell me.

STREPSIADES

Ah! let me see. What was the first thing? What was it then? Ah! that thing in which we knead the bread, oh! my god! what do you call it?

SOCRATES

Plague take the most forgetful and silliest of old addlepates!

STREPSIADES

Alas! what a calamity! what will become of me? I am undone if I do not learn how to ply my tongue. Oh! Clouds! give me good advice.

CHORUS-LEADER

Old man, we counsel you, if you have brought up a son, to send him to learn in your stead.

STREPSIADES

Undoubtedly I have a son, as well endowed as the best, but he is unwilling to learn. What will become of me?

CHORUS-LEADER

And you don't make him obey you?

STREPSIADES

You see, he is big and strong; moreover, through his mother he is a descendant of those fine birds, the race of Coesyra. Nevertheless, I will go and find him, and if he refuses, I will turn him out of the house. Go in, Socrates, and wait for me awhile.

(SOCRATES *goes into the Thoughtery,* STREPSIADES *into his own house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Do you understand, Socrates, that thanks to us you will be loaded with benefits? Here is a man, ready to obey you in all things. You see how he is carried away with admiration and enthusiasm. Profit by it to clip him as short as possible; fine chances are all too quickly gone.

STREPSIADES (*coming out of his house and pushing his son in front of him*)

No, by the Clouds! you stay here no longer; go and devour the ruins of your uncle Megacles' fortune.

PHIDIPPIDES

Oh! my poor father! what has happened to you? By the Olympian Zeus! you are no longer in your senses!

STREPSIADES

Look! "the Olympian Zeus." Oh! you fool! to believe in Zeus at your age!

PHIDIPPIDES

What is there in that to make you laugh?

STREPSIADES

You are then a tiny little child, if you credit such antiquated rubbish! But come here, that I may teach you; I will tell you something very necessary to know to be a man; but do not repeat it to anybody.

PHIDIPPIDES

Tell me, what is it?

STREPSIADES

Just now you swore by Zeus.

PHIDIPPIDES

Sure I did.

STREPSIADES

Do you see how good it is to learn? Phidippides, there is no Zeus.

PHIDIPPIDES

What is there then?

STREPSIADES

The Whirlwind has driven out Zeus and is King now.

PHIDIPPIDES

What drivel!

STREPSIADES

You must realize that it is true.

PHIDIPPIDES

And who says so?

STREPSIADES

Socrates, the Melian, and Chaerephon, who knows how to measure the jump of a flea.

PHIDIPPIDES

Have you reached such a pitch of madness that you believe those bilious fellows?

STREPSIADES

Use better language, and do not insult men who are clever and full of wisdom, who, to economize, never shave, shun the gymnasia and never go to the baths, while you, you only await my death to eat up my wealth. But come, come as quickly as you can to learn in my stead.

PHIDIPPIDES

And what good can be learnt of them?

STREPSIADES

What good indeed? Why, all human knowledge. Firstly, you will know yourself grossly ignorant. But await me here awhile.

(*He goes back into his house.*)

PHIDIPPIDES

Alas! what is to be done? Father has lost his wits. Must I have him certificated for lunacy, or must I order his coffin?

STREPSIADES (*returning with a bird in each hand*)

Come! what kind of bird is this? Tell me.

PHIDIPPIDES

A pigeon.

STREPSIADES

Good! And this female?

PHIDIPPIDES

A pigeon.

STREPSIADES

The same for both? You make me laugh! In the future you must call this one a pigeonnette and the other a pigeon.

PHIDIPPIDES

A pigeonnette! These then are the fine things you have just learnt at the school of these sons of Earth! [10]

STREPSIADES

And many others; but what I learnt I forgot at once, because I am too old.

PHIDIPPIDES

So this is why you have lost your cloak?

STREPSIADES

I have not lost it, I have consecrated it to Philosophy.

PHIDIPPIDES

And what have you done with your sandals, you poor fool?

STREPSIADES

If I have lost them, it is for what was necessary, just as Pericles did. But come, move yourself, let us go in; if necessary, do wrong to obey your father. When you were six years old and still lisped, I was the one who obeyed you. I remember at the feasts of Zeus you had a consuming wish for a little chariot and I bought it for you with the first obolus which I received as a juryman in the courts.

PHIDIPPIDES

You will soon repent of what you ask me to do.

STREPSIADES

Oh! now I am happy! He obeys. (*loudly*) Come, Socrates, come! Come out quick! Here I am bringing you my son; he refused, but I have persuaded him.

SOCRATES

Why, he is but a child yet. He is not used to these baskets, in which we suspend our minds.

PHIDIPPIDES

To make you better used to them, I would you were hung.

STREPSIADES

A curse upon you! you insult your master!

SOCRATES

"I would you were hung!" What a stupid speech! and so emphatically spoken! How can one ever get out of an accusation with such a tone, summon witnesses or touch or convince? And yet when we think, Hyperbolus learnt all this for one talent!

STREPSIADES

Rest undisturbed and teach him He has a most intelligent nature. Even when quite little he amused himself at home with making houses, carving boats, constructing little chariots of leather, and understood wonderfully how to make frogs out of pomegranate rinds. Teach him both methods of reasoning, the strong and also the weak, which by false arguments triumphs over the strong; if not the two, at least the false, and that in every possible way.

SOCRATES

The Just and Unjust Discourse themselves shall instruct him. I shall leave you.

STREPSIADES

But forget it not, he must always, always be able to confound the true.

(*Socrates enters the Thoughtery; a moment later the* JUST *and the* UNJUST DISCOURSE *come out; they are quarrelling violently.*)

JUST DISCOURSE

Come here! Shameless as you may be, will you dare to show your face to the spectators?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Take me where you will. I seek a throng, so that I may the better annihilate you.

JUST DISCOURSE

Annihilate me! Do you forget who you are?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

I am Reasoning.

JUST DISCOURSE

Yes, the weaker Reasoning.[1]

UNJUST DISCOURSE

But I triumph over you, who claim to be the stronger.

JUST DISCOURSE

By what cunning shifts, pray?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

By the invention of new maxims.

JUST DISCOURSE

. . . which are received with favour by these fools.

(*He points to the audience.*)

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Say rather, by these wise men.

JUST DISCOURSE

I am going to destroy you mercilessly.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

How pray? Let us see you do it.

JUST DISCOURSE

By saying what is true.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

I shall retort and shall very soon have the better of you. First, I maintain that justice has no existence.

JUST DISCOURSE

Has no existence?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

No existence! Why, where is it?

JUST DISCOURSE

With the gods.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

How then, if justice exists, was Zeus not put to death for having put his father in chains?

JUST DISCOURSE

Bah! this is enough to turn my stomach! A basin, quick!

UNJUST DISCOURSE

You are an old driveller and stupid withal.

JUST DISCOURSE

And you a degenerate and shameless fellow.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Hah! What sweet expressions!

JUST DISCOURSE

An impious buffoon.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

You crown me with roses and with lilies.

JUST DISCOURSE

A parricide.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Why, you shower gold upon me.

JUST DISCOURSE

Formerly it was a hailstorm of blows.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

I deck myself with your abuse.

JUST DISCOURSE

What impudence!

UNJUST DISCOURSE

What tomfoolery!

JUST DISCOURSE

It is because of you that the youth no longer attends the schools. The Athenians will soon recognize what lessons you teach those who are fools enough to believe you.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

You are overwhelmed with wretchedness.

JUST DISCOURSE

And you, you prosper. Yet you were poor when you said, "I am the Mysian Telephus," and used to stuff your wallet with maxims of Pandeletus to nibble at.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Oh! the beautiful wisdom, of which you are now boasting!

JUST DISCOURSE

Madman! But yet madder the city that keeps you, you, the corrupter of its youth!

UNJUST DISCOURSE

It is not you who will teach this young man; you are as old and out of date at Cronus.

JUST DISCOURSE

Nay, it will certainly be I, if he does not wish to be lost and to practise verbosity only.

UNJUST DISCOURSE (*to* PHIDIPPIDES)

Come here and leave him to beat the air.

JUST DISCOURSE

You'll regret it, if you touch him.

CHORUS-LEADER (*stepping between them as they are about to come to blows*)

A truce to your quarrellings and abuse! But you expound what you taught us formerly, and you, your new doctrine. Thus, after hearing each of you argue, he will be able to choose betwixt the two schools.

JUST DISCOURSE

I am quite agreeable.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

And I too.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Who is to speak first?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Let it be my opponent, he has my full consent; then I shall follow upon the very ground he shall have chosen and shall shatter him with a hail of new ideas and subtle fancies; if after that he dares to breathe another word, I shall sting him in the face and in the eyes with our maxims, which are as keen as the sting of a wasp, and he will die.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Here are two rivals confident in their powers of oratory and in the thoughts over which they have pondered so long. Let us see which will come triumphant out of the contest. This wisdom, for which my friends maintain such a persistent fight, is in great danger.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come then, you, who crowned men of other days with so many virtues, plead the cause dear to you, make yourself known to us.

JUST DISCOURSE

Very well, I will tell you what was the old education, when I used to teach justice with so much success and when modesty was held in veneration. Firstly, it was required of a child, that it should not utter a word. In the street, when they went to the music-school, all the youths of the same district marched lightly clad and ranged in good order, even when the snow was falling in great flakes. At the master's house they had to stand with their legs apart and they were taught to sing either, "Pallas, the Terrible, who overturneth cities," or "A noise resounded from afar" in the solemn tones of the ancient harmony. If anyone indulged in buffoonery or lent his voice any of the soft inflexions, like those which to-day the disciples of Phrynis take so much pains to form, he was treated as an enemy of the Muses and belaboured with blows. In the wrestling school they would sit with outstretched legs and without display of any indecency to the curious. When they rose, they would smooth over the sand, so as to leave no trace to excite obscene thoughts. Never was a child rubbed with oil below the belt; the rest of their bodies thus retained its fresh bloom and down, like a velvety peach. They were not to be seen approaching a lover and themselves rousing his passion by soft modulation of the voice

and lustful gaze. At table, they would not have dared, before those older than themselves, to have taken a radish, an aniseed or a leaf of parsley, and much less eat fish or thrushes or cross their legs.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

What antiquated rubbish! Have we got back to the days of the festivals of Zeus Polieus, to the Buphonia, to the time of the poet Cecides and the golden cicadas?

JUST DISCOURSE

Nevertheless by suchlike teaching I built up the men of Marathon. But you, you teach the children of to-day to bundle themselves quickly into their clothes, and I am enraged when I see them at the Panathenæa forgetting Athené while they dance, and covering their tools with their bucklers. Hence, young man, dare to range yourself beside me, who follow justice and truth; you will then be able to shun the public place, to refrain from the baths, to blush at all that is shameful, to fire up if your virtue is mocked at, to give place to your elders, to honour your parents, in short, to avoid all that is evil. Be modesty itself, and do not run to applaud the dancing girls; if you delight in such scenes, some courtesan will cast you her apple and your reputation will be done for. Do not bandy words with your father, nor treat him as a dotard, nor reproach the old man, who has cherished you, with his age.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

If you listen to him, by Bacchus! you will be the image of the sons of Hippocrates and will be called *mother's big ninny*.

JUST DISCOURSE

No, but you will pass your days at the gymnasia, glowing with strength and health; you will not go to the public place to cackle and wrangle as is done nowadays; you will not live in fear that you may be dragged before the courts for some trifle exaggerated by quibbling. But you will go down to the Academy to run beneath the sacred olives with some virtuous friend of your own age, your head encircled with the white reed, enjoying your ease and breathing the perfume of the yew and of the fresh sprouts of the poplar, rejoicing in the return of springtide and gladly listening to the gentle rustle of the plane tree and the elm. (*With greater warmth from here on*) If you devote yourself to practising my precepts, your chest will be stout, your colour glowing, your shoulders broad, your tongue short, your hips muscular, but your tool small. But if you follow the fashions of the day, you will be pallid in hue, have narrow shoulders, a narrow chest, a long tongue, small hips and a big thing; you will know how to spin forth long-winded arguments on law. You will be persuaded also to regard as

splendid everything that is shameful and as shameful everything that is honourable; in a word, you will wallow in degeneracy like Antimachus.

CHORUS (*singing*)

How beautiful, high-souled, brilliant is this wisdom that you practise! What a sweet odour of honesty is emitted by your discourse! Happy were those men of other days who lived when you were honoured! And you, seductive talker, come, find some fresh arguments, for your rival has done wonders.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You will have to bring out against him all the battery of your wit, if you desire to beat him and not to be laughed out of court.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

At last! I was choking with impatience, I was burning to upset his arguments! If I am called the Weaker Reasoning in the schools, it is just because I was the first to discover the means to confute the laws and the decrees of justice. To invoke solely the weaker arguments and yet triumph is an art worth more than a hundred thousand drachmae. But see how I shall batter down the sort of education of which he is so proud. Firstly, he forbids you to bathe in hot water. What grounds have you for condemning hot baths?

JUST DISCOURSE

Because they are baneful and enervate men.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Enough said! Oh! you poor wrestler! From the very outset I have seized you and hold you round the middle; you cannot escape me. Tell me, of all the sons of Zeus, who had the stoutest heart, who performed the most doughty deeds?

JUST DISCOURSE

None, in my opinion, surpassed Heracles.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Where have you ever seen cold baths called 'Bath of Heracles'? And yet who was braver than he?

JUST DISCOURSE

It is because of such quibbles, that the baths are seen crowded with young folk, who chatter there the livelong day while the gymnasia remain empty.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Next you condemn the habit of frequenting the market-place, while I approve this. If it were wrong Homer would never have made Nestor speak in public as well as all his wise heroes. As for the art of speaking, he tells you, young men should not practise it; I hold the contrary. Furthermore he preaches chastity to them. Both precepts are equally harmful. Have you ever seen chastity of any use to anyone? Answer and try to confute me.

JUST DISCOURSE

To many; for instance, Peleus won a sword thereby.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

A sword! Ah! what a fine present to make him! Poor wretch! Hyperbolus, the lamp-seller, thanks to his villainy, has gained more than . . . I do not know how many talents, but certainly no sword.

JUST DISCOURSE

Peleus owed it to his chastity that he became the husband of Thetis.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

. . . who left him in the lurch, for he was not the most ardent; in those nocturnal sports between the sheets, which so please women, he possessed but little merit. Get you gone, you are but an old fool. But you, young man, just consider a little what this temperance means and the delights of which it deprives you—young fellows, women, play, dainty dishes, wine, boisterous laughter. And what is life worth without these? Then, if you happen to commit one of these faults inherent in human weakness, some seduction or adultery, and you are caught in the act, you are lost, if you cannot speak. But follow my teaching and you will be able to satisfy your passions, to dance, to laugh, to blush at nothing. Suppose you are caught in the act of adultery. Then up and tell the husband you are not guilty, and recall to him the example of Zeus, who allowed himself to be conquered by love and by women. Being but a mortal, can you be stronger than a god?

JUST DISCOURSE

Suppose your pupil, following your advice, gets the radish rammed up his arse and then is depilated with a hot coal;[12] how are you going to prove to him that he is not a broad-arse? [13]

UNJUST DISCOURSE

What's the matter with being a broad-arse?

JUST DISCOURSE

Is there anything worse than that?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Now what will you say, if I beat you even on this point?

JUST DISCOURSE

I should certainly have to be silent then.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well then, reply! Our advocates, what are they?

JUST DISCOURSE

Sons of broad-arses.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Nothing is more true. And our tragic poets?

JUST DISCOURSE

Sons of broad-arses.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well said again. And our demagogues?

JUST DISCOURSE

Sons of broad-arses.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

You admit that you have spoken nonsense. And the spectators, what are they for the most part? Look at them.

JUST DISCOURSE

I am looking at them.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well! What do you see?

JUST DISCOURSE

By the gods, they are nearly all broad-arses. (*pointing*) See, this one I know to be such and that one and that other with the long hair.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

What have you to say, then?

JUST DISCOURSE

I am beaten. Debauchees! in the name of the gods, receive my cloak; I pass over to your ranks.

(*He goes back into the Thoughtery.*)

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well then! Are you going to take away your son or do you wish me to teach him how to speak?

STREPSIADES

Teach him, chastise him and do not fail to sharpen his tongue well, on one side for petty law-suits and on the other for important cases.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Don't worry, I shall return him to you an accomplished sophist.

PHIDIPPIDES

Very pale then and thoroughly hang-dog-looking.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Take him with you. (*The* UNJUST DISCOURSE *and* PHIDIPPIDES *go into the* THOUGHTERY. *To* STREPSIADES, *who is just going into his own house.*) I think you will regret this. (*The* CHORUS *turns and faces the audience.*) Judges, we are all about to tell you what you will gain by awarding us the crown as equity requires of you. In spring, when you wish to give your fields the first dressing, we will rain upon you first; the others shall wait. Then we will watch over your corn and over your vine-stocks; they will have no excess to fear, neither of heat nor of wet. But if a mortal dares to insult the goddesses of the Clouds, let him think of the ills we shall pour upon him. For him neither wine nor any harvest at all! Our terrible slings will mow down his young olive plants and his vines. If he is making bricks, it will rain, and our round hailstones will break the tiles of his roof. If he himself marries or any of his relations or friends, we shall cause rain to fall the whole night long. Verily, he would prefer to live in Egypt than to have given this iniquitous verdict.

STREPSIADES (*coming out again*)

Another four, three, two days, then the eve, then the day, the fatal day of payment! I tremble, I quake, I shudder, for it's the day of the old moon and the new. Then all my creditors take the oath, pay their deposits,[11] swear my downfall and my ruin. As for me, I beseech them to be reasonable, to be just, "My friend, do not demand this sum, wait a little for this other and give me time for this third one." Then they will pretend that at this rate they will never be repaid, will accuse me of bad faith and will threaten me with the law. Well then, let them sue me! I care nothing for that, if only Phidippides has learnt to speak fluently. I am going to find out; I'll knock at the door of the school. (*He knocks.*) . . . Ho! slave, slave!

SOCRATES (*coming out*)

Welcome! Strepsiades!

STREPSIADES

Welcome! Socrates! But first take this sack (*offers him a sack of flour*); it is right to reward the master with some present. And my son, whom you took off lately, has he learnt this famous reasoning? Tell me.

SOCRATES

He has learnt it.

STREPSIADES

Wonderful! Oh! divine Knavery!

SOCRATES

You will win just as many causes as you choose.

STREPSIADES

Even if I have borrowed before witnesses?

SOCRATES

So much the better, even if there are a thousand of them!

STREPSIADES (*bursting into song*)

Then I am going to shout with all my might. "Woe to the usurers, woe to their capital and their interest and their compound interest! You shall play me no more bad turns. My son is being taught there, his tongue is being sharpened into a double-edged weapon; he is my defender, the saviour of my house, the ruin of my foes! His poor father was crushed down with misfortune and he delivers him." Go and call him to me quickly. Oh! my child! my dear little one! run forward to your father's voice!

SOCRATES (*singing*)

Lo, the man himself!

STREPSIADES (*singing*)

Oh, my friend, my dearest friend!

SOCRATES (*singing*)

Take your son, and get you gone.

STREPSIADES (*as* PHIDIPPIDES *appears*)

Oh, my son! oh! oh! what a pleasure to see your pallor! You are ready first to deny and then to contradict; it's as clear as noon. What a child of your country you are! How your lips quiver with the famous, "What have you to say now?" How well you know, I am certain, to put on the

look of a victim, when it is you who are making both victims and dupes! And what a truly Attic glance! Come, it's for you to save me, seeing it is you who have ruined me.

PHIDIPPIDES

What is it you fear then?

STREPSIADES

The day of the old and the new.

PHIDIPPIDES

Is there then a day of the old and the new?

STREPSIADES

The day on which they threaten to pay deposit against me.[11]

PHIDIPPIDES

Then so much the worse for those who have deposited! for it's not possible for one day to be two.

STREPSIADES

What?

PHIDIPPIDES

Why, undoubtedly, unless a woman can be both old and young at the same time.

STREPSIADES

But so runs the law.

PHIDIPPIDES

I think the meaning of the law is quite misunderstood.

STREPSIADES

What does it mean?

PHIDIPPIDES

Old Solon loved the people.

STREPSIADES

What has that to do with the old day and the new?

PHIDIPPIDES

He has fixed two days for the summons, the last day of the old moon and the first day of the new; but the deposits must only be paid on the first day of the new moon.

STREPSIADES

And why did he also name the last day of the old?

PHIDIPPIDES

So, my dear sir, that the debtors, being there the day before, might free themselves by mutual agreement, or that else, if not, the creditor might begin his action on the morning of the new moon.

STREPSIADES

Why then do the magistrates have the deposits paid on the last of the month and not the next day?

PHIDIPPIDES

I think they do as the gluttons do, who are the first to pounce upon the dishes. Being eager to carry off these deposits, they have them paid in a day too soon.

STREPSIADES

Splendid! (*to the audience*) Ah! you poor brutes, who serve for food to us clever folk! You are only down here to swell the number, true blockheads, sheep for shearing, heap of empty pots! Hence I will sing a song of victory for my son and myself. "Oh! happy, Strepsiades! what cleverness is thine! and what a son thou hast here!" Thus my friends and my neighbours will say, jealous at seeing me gain all my suits. But come in, I wish to regale you first.

(*They both go in. A moment later a creditor arrives, with his witness.*)

PASIAS (*to the* WITNESS)

A man should never lend a single obolus. It would be better to put on a brazen face at the outset than to get entangled in such matters. I want to see my money again and I bring you here to-day to attest the loan. I am going to make a foe of a neighbour; but, as long as I live, I do not wish my country to have to blush for me. Come, I am going to summon Strepsiades. . . .

STREPSIADES (*coming out of his house*)

Who is this?

PASIAS

. . . . for the old day and the new.

STREPSIADES (*to the* WITNESS)

I call you to witness, that he has named two days. What do you want of me?

PASIAS

I claim of you the twelve minae, which you borrowed from me to buy the dapple-grey horse.

STREPSIADES

A horse! do you hear him? I, who detest horses, as is well known.

PASIAS

I call Zeus to witness, that you swore by the gods to return them to me.

STREPSIADES

Because at that time, by Zeus! Phidippides did not yet know the irrefutable argument.

PASIAS

Would you deny the debt on that account?

STREPSIADES

If not, what use is his science to me?

PASIAS

Will you dare to swear by the gods that you owe me nothing?

STREPSIADES

By which gods?

PASIAS

By Zeus, Hermes and Posidon!

STREPSIADES

Why, I would give three obols for the pleasure of swearing by them.

PASIAS

Woe upon you, impudent knave!

STREPSIADES

Oh! what a fine wine-skin you would make if flayed!

PASIAS

Heaven! he jeers at me!

STREPSIADES

It would hold six gallons easily.

PASIAS

By great Zeus! by all the gods! you shall not scoff at me with impunity.

STREPSIADES

Ah! how you amuse me with your gods! how ridiculous it seems to a sage to hear Zeus invoked.

PASIAS

Your blasphemies will one day meet their reward. But, come, will you repay me my money, yes or no? Answer me, that I may go.

STREPSIADES

Wait a moment, I am going to give you a distinct answer. (*He goes indoors and returns immediately with a kneading-trough.*)

PASIAS (*to the* WITNESS)

What do you think he will do? Do you think he will pay?

STREPSIADES

Where is the man who demands money? Tell me, what is this?

PASIAS

Him? Why, he is your kneading-trough.

STREPSIADES

And you dare to demand money of me, when you are so ignorant? I will not return an obolus to anyone who says *him* instead of *her* for a kneading-trough.

PASIAS

You will not repay?

STREPSIADES

Not if I know it. Come, an end to this, pack off as quick as you can.

PASIAS

I go, but, may I die, if it be not to pay my deposit for a summons.

(*Exit*)

STREPSIADES

Very well! It will be so much more loss to add to the twelve minæ. But truly it makes me sad, for I do pity a poor simpleton who says *him* for a kneading-trough

(*Another creditor arrives.*)

AMYNIAS

Woe! ah woe is me!

STREPSIADES

Wait! who is this whining fellow? Can it be one of the gods of Carcinus?

AMYNIAS

Do you want to know who I am? I am a man of misfortune!

STREPSIADES

Get on your way then.

AMYNIAS (*in tragic style*)

Oh! cruel god! Oh Fate, who hast broken the wheels of my chariot! Oh, Pallas, thou hast undone me!

STREPSIADES

What ill has Tlepolemus done you?

AMYNIAS

Instead of jeering me, friend, make your son return me the money he has had of me; I am already unfortunate enough.

STREPSIADES

What money?

AMYNIAS

The money he borrowed of me.

STREPSIADES

You have indeed had misfortune, it seems to me.

AMYNIAS

Yes, by the gods! I have been thrown from a chariot.

STREPSIADES

Why then drivel as if you had fallen off an ass? [15]

AMYNIAS

Am I drivelling because I demand my money?

STREPSIADES

No, no, you cannot be in your right senses.

AMYNIAS

Why?

STREPSIADES

No doubt your poor wits have had a shake.

AMYNIAS

But by Hermes! I will sue you at law, if you do not pay me.

STREPSIADES

Just tell me; do you think it is always fresh water that Zeus lets fall every time it rains, or is it always the same water that the sun pumps over the earth?

AMYNIAS

I neither know, nor care.

STREPSIADES

And actually you would claim the right to demand your money, when you know not an iota of these celestial phenomena?

AMYNIAS

If you are short, pay me the interest anyway.

STREPSIADES

What kind of animal is interest?

AMYNIAS

What? Does not the sum borrowed go on growing, growing every month, each day as the time slips by?

STREPSIADES

Well put. But do you believe there is more water in the sea now than there was formerly?

AMYNIAS

No, it's just the same quantity. It cannot increase.

STREPSIADES

Thus, poor fool, the sea, that receives the rivers, never grows, and yet you would have your money grow? Get you gone, away with you, quick! Slave! bring me the ox-goad!

AMYNIAS

I have witnesses to this.

STREPSIADES

Come, what are you waiting for? Will you not budge, old nag!

AMYNIAS

What an insult!

STREPSIADES

Unless you start trotting, I shall catch you and stick this in your arse, you sorry packhorse! (AMYNIAS *runs off.*) Ah! you start, do you? I was about to drive you pretty fast, I tell you—you and your wheels and your chariot!

(*He enters his house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Whither does the passion of evil lead! here is a perverse old man, who wants to cheat his creditors; but some mishap, which will speedily punish this rogue for his shameful schemings, cannot fail to overtake him from to-day. For a long time he has been burning to have his son know how to fight against all justice and right and to gain even the most iniquitous causes against his adversaries every one. I think this wish is going to be fulfilled. But mayhap, mayhap, he will soon wish his son were dumb rather!

STREPSIADES (*rushing out with* PHIDIPPIDES *after him*)

Oh! oh! neighbours, kinsmen, fellow-citizens, help! help! to the rescue, I am being beaten! Oh! my head! oh! my jaw! Scoundrel! Do you beat your own father?

PHIDIPPIDES (*calmly*)

Yes, father, I do.

STREPSIADES

See! he admits he is beating me.

PHIDIPPIDES

Of course I do.

STREPSIADES

You villain, you parricide, you gallows-bird!

PHIDIPPIDES

Go on, repeat your epithets, call me a thousand other names, if it please you. The more you curse, the greater my amusement!

STREPSIADES

Oh! you ditch-arsed cynic!

PHIDIPPIDES

How fragrant the perfume breathed forth in your words.

STREPSIADES

Do you beat your own father?

PHIDIPPIDES

Yes, by Zeus! and I am going to show you that I do right in beating you.

STREPSIADES

Oh, wretch! can it be right to beat a father?

PHIDIPPIDES

I will prove it to you, and you shall own yourself vanquished.

STREPSIADES

Own myself vanquished on a point like this?

PHIDIPPIDES

It's the easiest thing in the world. Choose whichever of the two reasonings you like.

STREPSIADES

Of which reasonings?

PHIDIPPIDES

The Stronger and the Weaker.

STREPSIADES

Miserable fellow! Why, I am the one who had you taught how to refute what is right, and now you would persuade me it is right a son should beat his father.

PHIDIPPIDES

I think I shall convince you so thoroughly that, when you have heard me, you will not have a word to say.

STREPSIADES

Well, I am curious to hear what you have to say.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Consider well, old man, how you can best triumph over him. His brazenness shows me that he thinks himself sure of his case; he has some argument which gives him nerve. Note the confidence in his look!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But how did the fight begin? tell the Chorus; you cannot help doing that much.

STREPSIADES

I will tell you what was the start of the quarrel. At the end of the meal, as you know, I bade him take his lyre and sing me the air of Simonides, which tells of the fleece of the ram. He replied bluntly, that it was stupid, while drinking, to play the lyre and sing, like a woman when she is grinding barley.

PHIDIPPIDES

Why, by rights I ought to have beaten and kicked you the very moment you told me to sing!

STREPSIADES

That is just how he spoke to me in the house, furthermore he added, that Simonides was a detestable poet. However, I mastered myself and for a while said nothing. Then I said to him, 'At least, take a myrtle branch and recite a passage from Aeschylus to me.'—'For my own part,' he at once replied, 'I look upon Aeschylus as the first of poets, for his verses roll superbly; they're nothing but incoherence, bombast and turgidity.' Yet still I smothered my wrath and said, 'Then recite one of the famous pieces from the modern poets.' Then he commenced a piece in which Euripides shows, oh! horror! a brother, who violates his own uterine sister.[16] Then I could not longer restrain myself, and attacked him with the most injurious abuse; naturally he retorted; hard words were hurled on both sides, and finally he sprang at me, broke my bones, bore me to earth, strangled and started killing me!

PHIDIPPIDES

I was right. What! not praise Euripides, the greatest of our poets?

STREPSIADES

He the greatest of our poets? Ah! if I but dared to speak! but the blows would rain upon me harder than ever.

PHIDIPPIDES

Undoubtedly and rightly too.

STREPSIADES

Rightly! oh! what impudence! to me, who brought you up! when you could hardly lisp, I guessed what you wanted. If you said *broo, broo,* well, I brought you your milk; if you asked for *mam mam,* I gave you bread; and you had no sooner said, *caca,* than I took you outside and held you out. And just now, when you were strangling me, I shouted, I bellowed that I was about to crap; and you, you scoundrel, had not the heart to take me outside, so that, though almost choking, I was compelled to do my crapping right there.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Young men, your hearts must be panting with impatience. What is Phidippides going to say? If, after such conduct, he proves he has done well, I would not give an obolus for the hide of old men.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, you, who know how to brandish and hurl the keen shafts of the new science, find a way to convince us, give your language an appearance of truth.

PHIDIPPIDES

How pleasant it is to know these clever new inventions and to be able to defy the established laws! When I thought only about horses, I was not able to string three words together without a mistake, but now that the master has altered and improved me and that I live in this world of subtle thought, of reasoning and of meditation, I count on being able to prove satisfactorily that I have done well to thrash my father.

STREPSIADES

Mount your horse! By Zeus! I would rather defray the keep of a four-in-hand team than be battered with blows.

PHIDIPPIDES

I revert to what I was saying when you interrupted me. And first, answer me, did you beat me in my childhood?

STREPSIADES

Why, assuredly, for your good and in your own best interest.

PHIDIPPIDES

Tell me, is it not right, that in turn I should beat you for your good, since it is for a man's own best interest to be beaten? What! must your body be free of blows, and not mine? am I not free-born too? the children are to weep and the fathers go free? You will tell me, that according to the law, it is the lot of children to be beaten. But I reply that the old men are children twice over and that it is far more fitting to chastise them than the young, for there is less excuse for their faults.

STREPSIADES

But the law nowhere admits that fathers should be treated thus.

PHIDIPPIDES

Was not the legislator who carried this law a man like you and me? In those days he got men to believe him; then why should not I too have the right to establish for the future a new law, allowing children to beat their fathers in turn? We make you a present of all the blows which were received before his law, and admit that you thrashed us with impunity. But look how the cocks and other animals fight with their fathers; and yet what difference is there betwixt them and ourselves, unless it be that they do not propose decrees?

STREPSIADES

But if you imitate the cocks in all things, why don't you scratch up the dunghill, why don't you sleep on a perch?

PHIDIPPIDES

That has no bearing on the case, good sir; Socrates would find no connection, I assure you.

STREPSIADES

Then do not beat at all, for otherwise you have only yourself to blame afterwards.

PHIDIPPIDES

What for?

STREPSIADES

I have the right to chastise you, and you to chastise your son, if you have one.

PHIDIPPIDES

And if I have not, I shall have cried in vain, and you will die laughing in my face.

STREPSIADES

What say you, all here present? It seems to me that he is right, and I am of opinion that they should be accorded their right. If we think wrongly, it is but just we should be beaten.

PHIDIPPIDES

Again, consider this other point.

STREPSIADES

It will be the death of me.

PHIDIPPIDES

But you will certainly feel no more anger because of the blows I have given you.

STREPSIADES

Come, show me what profit I shall gain from it.

PHIDIPPIDES

I shall beat my mother just as I have you.

STREPSIADES

What do you say? what's that you say? Hah! this is far worse still.

PHIDIPPIDES

And what if I prove to you by our school reasoning, that one ought to beat one's mother?

STREPSIADES

Ah! if you do that, then you will only have to throw yourself, along with Socrates and his reasoning, into the Barathrum. Oh! Clouds! all our troubles emanate from you, from you, to whom I entrusted myself, body and soul.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No, you alone are the cause, because you have pursued the path of evil.

STREPSIADES

Why did you not say so then, instead of egging on a poor ignorant old man?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We always act thus, when we see a man conceive a passion for what is evil; we strike him with some terrible disgrace, so that he may learn to fear the gods.

STREPSIADES

Alas! oh Clouds! that's hard indeed, but it's just! I ought not to have cheated my creditors. . . . But come, my dear son, come with me to take vengeance on this wretched Chaerephon and on Socrates, who have deceived us both.

PHIDIPPIDES

I shall do nothing against our masters.

STREPSIADES

Oh! show some reverence for ancestral Zeus!

PHIDIPPIDES

Mark him and his ancestral Zeus! What a fool you are! Does any such being as Zeus exist?

STREPSIADES

Why, assuredly.

PHIDIPPIDES

No, a thousand times no! The ruler of the world is the Whirlwind, that has unseated Zeus.

STREPSIADES

He has not dethroned him. I believed it, because of this whirligig here. Unhappy wretch that I am! I have taken a piece of clay to be a god.

PHIDIPPIDES

Very well! Keep your stupid nonsense for your own consumption.

(*He goes back into* STREPSIADES' *house.*)

STREPSIADES

Oh! what madness! I had lost my reason when I threw over the gods through Socrates' seductive phrases. (*Addressing the statue of Hermes*) Oh! good Hermes, do not destroy me in your wrath. Forgive me; their babbling had driven me crazy. Be my counselor. Shall I pursue them at law or shall I . . . ? Order and I obey.—You are right, no law-suit; but up! let us burn down the home of those praters. Here, Xanthias, here! take a ladder, come forth and arm yourself with an axe; now mount upon the Thoughtery, demolish the roof, if you love your master, and may the house fall in upon them. Ho! bring me a blazing torch! There is more than one of them, arch-impostors as they are, on whom I am determined to have vengeance.

A DISCIPLE (*from within*)

Oh! oh!

STREPSIADES

Come, torch, do your duty! Burst into full flame!

DISCIPLE

What are you up to?

STREPSIADES

What am I up to? Why, I am entering upon a subtle argument with the beams of the house.

SECOND DISCIPLE (*from within*)

Hullo! hullo! who is burning down our house?

STREPSIADES

The man whose cloak you have appropriated.

SECOND DISCIPLE

You are killing us!

STREPSIADES

That is just exactly what I hope, unless my axe plays me false, or I fall and break my neck.

SOCRATES (*appearing at the window*)

Hi! you fellow on the roof, what are you doing up there?

STREPSIADES (*mocking* SOCRATES' *manner*)
I am traversing the air and contémplating the sun.

SOCRATES
Ah! ah! woe is upon me! I am suffocating!

SECOND DISCIPLE
And I, alas, shall be burnt up!

STREPSIADES
Ah! you insulted the gods! You studied the face of the moon! Chase them, strike and beat them down! Forward! they have richly deserved their fate—above all, by reason of their blasphemies.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
So let the Chorus file off the stage. Its part is played.

1. City slaves were normally punished by being forced to leave the delights of urban life and to undergo the unwanted rigours of agricultural labour. The Peloponnesian War, with its almost annual invasions of Attica, rendered it impossible to till the fields of the country-side and thus difficult to punish the slaves of Athens.

2. The ending *-ippus* (Greek *hippos,* "horse") had honorific connotations suggesting wealth and status. The combining form *Phid-*, on the other hand (Greek *pheido,* "thrift") suggested precisely the opposite.

3. Aristophanes here coins the word *dienterеuma,* meaning a "looking through intestines." A French translator renders, *"intestigation."*

4. A regular part of the ritual of sacrifice was the sprinkling of the head of the victim with flour.

5. These are characters from the lost *Banqueters,* which Aristophanes exhibited in 427, his first production.

6. Socrates here is speaking, of course, of poetical measures, whereas Strepsiades consistently misunderstands and takes them for measures of capacity. It is the same as if someone were to ask, "Do you like the hexameter?" and to receive the answer, "I prefer the kilometer."

7. The primary meaning of the Greek word *daktylos* was "finger."

8. The vocative case of Greek masculines in *-as* has the apparently feminine ending *-a.*

9. A pun on *koris,* the Greek word for "bug."

10. The sons of Earth were the Titans, who had fought against the gods. Hence the epithet here implies atheism or irreligion on the part of Socrates and his disciples.

11. The terminology of the sophists designated the Just Discourse as the stronger, the Unjust as the weaker, reasoning.

12. This was the punishment supposed to be meted out to adulterers.

13. The Greek word is *euryproktos;* its precise signification in ordinary usage is difficult to determine, and it has seemed better to give its etymologically literal translation in the text and then to explain in this note that it was probably only a general term of abuse.

14. By Athenian law, if anyone summoned another to appear in court,

he was obliged to deposit a sum sufficient to cover the costs of procedure.

15. A person who fell off an ass was one who got himself into trouble through no one's fault but his own, hence a stupid person. The expression also contains a pun, *ap' onou pesein*, "to fall off an ass" being very like *apo nou pesein*, "to lose one's wits."

16. Marriage with a half-sister was incestuous in the eyes of the Athenians only when the common parent was the mother.

IV
THE WASPS

Characters in the Play

Philocleon
Bdelycleon, *his Son*
Sosias, *Slave of Philocleon*
Xanthias, *Slave of Philocleon*
Boys
Dogs
A Guest
A Baker's Wife
An Accuser
Chorus of Wasps

INTRODUCTION

A LITTLE less than a year after the signal and merited failure of *The Clouds,* Aristophanes won the third victory of his career with *The Wasps,* which he produced at the Lenaean festival of 422 under the pseudonym of Philonides. The play is thoroughly political in its theme and genuinely comic in its treatment, and its construction testifies to a care and exhibits a skill that have not hitherto been observable in the poet's productions. It is evident that the disappointment of 423, so far from discouraging him, has challenged Aristophanes to greater achievement and taught him a number of fruitful lessons. What he has still to acquire is a sure and reliable sense of proportion, and the only significant defect of *The Wasps* lies in the fact that the first part is longer than the essential humour of its theme can justify, while the latter section is not developed to the full extent of its potentialities.

The play is customarily designated as a satire on an excessive passion for litigation and juridical proceedings which is supposed to have characterized the Athenian populace, but this pronouncement, apposite enough to *Les Plaideurs* of Racine, is both wide of the mark and far too general if applied to the *The Wasps* of Aristophanes. Nowhere in this comedy does the poet suggest that the Athenian judicial institutions themselves are anything but admirable, nor does he ever give us to understand that the litigious mania which he so amusingly lampoons was in any sense epidemic with his countrymen. A keener analysis and a sounder judgment disclose that the true targets of the poet's attack are the *abuses* of the Athenian judicial system, for which he obviously holds the demagogues solely or primarily culpable. Thus *The Wasps* is a sort of appendix to *The Knights,* a less direct and more specialized continuation of the fight against Cleon, begun as early as 426 with the lost *Babylonians.*

The first part of the play, as far as the parabasis, is taken up with the efforts of the antidemagogical Bdelycleon to prevent his father Philocleon, the tanner's friend, from indulging his insatiable craving for jury service. The old man has hitherto been completely successful in nullifying these attempts, and Bdelycleon in desperation has shut him up in the house and stretched a huge net around it. Two sleepy slaves strive man-

fully to keep watch on the front of the house, while Bdelycleon himself mounts guard on the roof.

The comedy opens with this tableau of varied vigilance, and as soon as the situation has been explained to the audience the action is initiated in a series of frantic and fantastic efforts on the part of Philocleon to escape his odious confinement and to get to court in time for the trials. First he is heard in the stove-chamber, "ferreting about like a rat in his hole," and a moment later he affects to be the smoke coming out of the chimney. Balked in this, he requests his son to let him go out to sell his ass, and when Bdelycleon, intending to deprive him of this excuse, fetches the ass himself, his father is discovered clinging to its belly like another Odysseus escaping from the Cyclops' cave. His son quickly shuts him up in the house again, but just as the slaves are piling stones against the door, a falling brick warns them that Philocleon has crept beneath the tiles of the roof and is about to fly away like a sparrow. As soon as this attempt has been foiled, the old man's fellow jurymen, costumed as wasps, arrive to take him to court. The sight of his worthy companions and contemporaries gives new zeal to his heart and fresh strength to his jaws, and even though he is toothless he gnaws a hole in the net and is letting himself down from his window, when his son awakes from a brief sleep and strives energetically to prevent his escape.

The Wasps come gallantly to the air of their fellow creature and a lively combat ensues between the jurymen on the one hand and Bdelycleon and his slaves on the other. Eventually blows give place to words and a lengthy debate is held between the father and the son on the merits and the defects of the former's beloved profession. Bdelycleon finally convinces his father that he is really nothing but the tool of the demagogues and promises to let him amuse himself by holding trials in his own home if he will only refrain from judging in public. The old man agrees to this, and when all the paraphernalia of a typical court have been travestied and collected, the first plaintiff appears before the new domestic tribunal. The subsequent trial of the dog Labes for the theft of a Sicilian cheese is one of Aristophanes' most felicitous inspirations, particularly in its conclusion, when Philocleon is misled into voting for acquittal. This is the first time in his life that he has ever been so foolish, and he swoons quite away when he learns of the dreadful error that he has committed. Bdelycleon revives him and takes him into the house, attempting to console him with promises of the gay life that he is henceforth to lead.

The stage is now clear and the Chorus is at long last given an opportunity to deliver the parabasis. The anapæsts reproach the audience for their reception of *The Clouds* a year earlier and recite the services which the poet claims to have rendered his native city. The tender and nostalgic ode, together with the epirrheme and the antode, celebrates the glorious deeds

of the old jurymen in their youth, at Marathon and under Cimon, and the antepirrheme explains why they are costumed as wasps. None of the comedies that have come down to us contains a parabasis so well integrated or so effective as this one.

At the conclusion of the parabasis Bdelycleon and his father emerge from the house on the way to a banquet; the new life of the old man is already beginning. Before he can embark on this, however, he must be taught how to act, the juryman must be made into a gentleman. The scene in which this takes place is one of Aristophanes' best, and the only adverse criticism that can be levelled against it is that it is not long enough; its quality is such that one is dissatisfied with its quantity. In all too short a time, we feel, the son becomes either satisfied with his father's behaviour or resigned to the impossibility of its improvement, and the pair depart for the dinner-party.

After a brief ode by the Chorus, Xanthias, the slave, returns with lurid reports of Philocleon's misbehaviour; he has drunk far too much, made a fool of himself, insulted all the guests, absconded with the flute-girl, and on the way home been guilty of assault and robbery. Immediately the miscreant enters in person, and a highly amusing scene follows in which he practises his newly acquired social and conversational graces on those whom he has recently maltreated. Finally his son contrives to get him into the house, but he can not keep him there, and soon the old man reappears, now dominated by Terpsichorean urges, and the comedy ends with a wild dance in which Philocleon matches his talents against those of the three little sons of Carcinus the tragedian.

Such is the hilarious and satisfying conclusion of the finest comedy that Aristophanes has so far produced. There have not been many who have justly appreciated its excellence, for it is of all the plays the hardest to learn to love. Its subject is alien to our sympathies and distant from our understanding, and only the candid light of intimate acquaintance can reveal the treasury of true wit and high art which it contains. *The Acharnians* was an excellent comedy in its own right, but it clearly promised even better ones to come. The fulfilment of these promises was prorogued or obstructed by the excessive courage of *The Knights* and the false direction of *The Clouds*. In *The Wasps* Aristophanes has ceased to disappoint us and has written a comedy which not only makes good most of the promises of *The Acharnians* but is itself filled with clearer and brighter auguries. The poet will not disappoint us again; from the work of the next ten years of his life there have been preserved four plays which represent for us the highest achievement of his art, and in them we shall see all the early promises fulfilled, not only those of *The Acharnians*, but the more difficult ones of *The Wasps* as well.

THE WASPS

(SCENE:—*In the background is the house of* PHILOCLEON, *surrounded by a huge net. Two slaves are on guard, one of them asleep. On the roof is* BDELYCLEON.)

SOSIAS (*waking* XANTHIAS *up*)

WHY, Xanthias! what are you doing, wretched man?

XANTHIAS

I am teaching myself how to rest; I have been awake and on watch the whole night.

SOSIAS

So you want to earn trouble for your ribs, eh? Don't you know what sort of animal we are guarding here?

XANTHIAS

Aye indeed! but I want to put my cares to sleep for a while.

(*He falls asleep again.*)

SOSIAS

Beware what you do. I too feel soft sleep spreading over my eyes.

XANTHIAS

Are you crazy, like a Corybant?

SOSIAS

No! It's Bacchus who lulls me off.

XANTHIAS

Then you serve the same god as myself. Just now a heavy slumber settled on my eyelids like a hostile Mede; I nodded and, faith! I had a wondrous dream.

SOSIAS

Indeed! and so had I. A dream such as I never had before. But first tell me yours.

XANTHIAS

I saw an eagle, a gigantic bird, descend upon the market-place; it seized a brazen buckler with its talons and bore it away into the highest heavens, then I saw it was Cleonymus had thrown it away.

SOSIAS

This Cleonymus is a riddle worth propounding among guests. How can one and the same animal have cast away his buckler both on land, in the sky and at sea?

XANTHIAS

Alas! what ill does such a dream portend for me?

SOSIAS

Rest undisturbed! Please the gods, no evil will befall you.

XANTHIAS

Nevertheless, it's a fatal omen when a man throws away his weapons. But what was your dream? Let me hear.

SOSIAS

Oh! it is a dream of high import. It has reference to the hull of the State; to nothing less.

XANTHIAS

Tell it to me quickly, show me its very keel.

SOSIAS

In my first slumber I thought I saw sheep, wearing cloaks and carrying staves, met in assembly on the Pnyx; a rapacious whale was haranguing them and screaming like a pig that is being grilled.

XANTHIAS

Faugh! faugh!

SOSIAS

What's the matter?

XANTHIAS

Enough, enough, spare me. Your dream stinks vilely of old leather.[1]

SOSIAS

Then this scoundrelly whale seized a balance and set to weighing ox-fat.[2]

XANTHIAS

Alas! it's our poor Athenian people, whom this accursed beast wishes to cut up and despoil of their fat.

SOSIAS

Seated on the ground close to it, I saw Theorus, who had the head of a crow. Then Alcibiades said to me in his lisping way, "Do you thee? Theoruth hath a crow'th head."

XANTHIAS

Ah! that's very well lisped indeed!

SOSIAS

Isn't this mighty strange? Theorus turning into a crow!

XANTHIAS

No, it is glorious.

SOSIAS

Why?

XANTHIAS

Why? He was a man and now he has suddenly become a crow; does it not foretoken that he will take his flight from here and go to the crows? [3]

SOSIAS

Interpreting dreams so aptly certainly is worth two obols.

XANTHIAS (*turning to the audience*)

Come, I must explain the matter to the spectators. But first a few words of preamble: expect nothing very high-flown from us, nor any jests stolen from Megara; we have no slaves, who throw baskets of nuts [4] to the spectators, nor any Heracles to be robbed of his dinner, nor does Euripides get loaded with contumely; and despite the happy chance that gave Cleon his fame we shall not go out of our way to belabour him again. Our little subject is not wanting in sense; it is well within your capacity [5] and at the same time cleverer than many vulgar comedies.—We have a master of great renown, who is now sleeping up there on the other story. He has bidden us keep guard over his father, whom he has locked in, so that he may not go out. This father has a curious complaint; not one of you could hit upon or guess it, if I did not tell you.—Well then, try! I hear Amynias, the son of Pronapus, over there, saying, "He is addicted to gambling." He's wrong! He is imputing his own malady to others. Yet love is indeed the principal part of his disease. Ah! here Sosias is telling Dercylus, "He loves drinking." Wrong again! the love of wine is a good man's failing. "Well then," says Nicostratus of the Scambonian deme, "he either loves sacrifices or else strangers." God no! he is not fond of strangers, Nicostratus, for he who says "Philoxenus" means a pederast. It's mere waste of time, you will not find it out. If you want to know it,

keep silence! I will tell your our master's complaint; of all men, it is he who is fondest of the Heliaea. Thus, to be judging is his hobby, and he groans if he is not sitting on the first seat. He does not close an eye at night, and if he dozes off for an instant his mind flies instantly to the clepsydra. He is so accustomed to hold the balloting pebble, that he awakes with his three fingers pinched together as if he were offering incense to the new moon. If he sees scribbled on some doorway, "How charming is Demos, the son of Pyrilampes!" he will write beneath it, "How charming is Cemos!" His cock crowed one evening; said he, "He has had money from the accused to awaken me too late. As soon as he rises from supper he bawls for his shoes and away he rushes down there before dawn to sleep beforehand, glued fast to the column like an oyster. He is a merciless judge, never failing to draw the convicting line [6] and return home with his nails full of wax like a bumble-bee. Fearing he might run short of pebbles he keeps enough at home to cover a sea-beach, so that he may have the means of recording his sentence. Such is his madness, and all advice is useless; he only judges the more each day. So we keep him under lock and key, to prevent his going out; for his son is broken-hearted over this mania. At first he tried him with gentleness, wanted to persuade him to wear the cloak no longer, to go out no more; unable to convince him, he had him bathed and purified according to the ritual without any greater success, and then handed him over to the Corybantes; but the old man escaped them, and carrying off the kettledrum, rushed right into the midst of the Heliasts. As Cybelé could do nothing with her rites, his son took him to Aegina and forcibly made him lie one night in the temple of Asclepius, the God of Healing, but before daylight there he was to be seen at the gate of the tribunal. Since then we let him go out no more, but he escaped us by the drains or by the skylight, so we stuffed up every opening with old rags and made all secure; then he drove short sticks into the wall and sprang from rung to rung like a magpie. Now we have stretched nets all around the court and we keep watch and ward. The old man's name is Philocleon, it's the best name he could have, and the son is called Bdelycleon, for he is a man very fit to cure an insolent fellow of his boasting.

BDELYCLEON (*from the roof*)

Xanthias! Sosias! Are you asleep?

XANTHIAS

Alas!

SOSIAS

What is the matter?

XANTHIAS

Why, Bdelycleon is getting up.

BDELYCLEON

Will neither of you come here? My father has got into the stove-chamber and is ferreting about like a rat in his hole. Take care he does not escape through the bath drain. You there, put all your weight against the door.

XANTHIAS

Yes, master.

BDELYCLEON

By Zeus! what is that noise in the chimney? Hullo! who are you?

PHILOCLEON (*poking his head out of the chimney*)

I am the smoke going up.

BDELYCLEON

Smoke? smoke of what wood?

PHILOCLEON

Of fig-wood.[7]

BDELYCLEON

Ah! that's the most acrid of all. But you shall not get out. Where is the chimney cover? Come down again. Now, up with another cross-bar. Now look out for some fresh dodge. But am I not the most unfortunate of men? Henceforward I shall only be called the son of Capnius.

XANTHIAS

He is pushing the door.

BDELYCLEON

Throw your weight upon it, come, put heart into the work. I will come and help you. Watch both lock and bolt. Take care he does not gnaw through the peg.

PHILOCLEON (*from within*)

What are you doing, you wretches? Let me go out; it is imperative that I go and judge, or Dracontides will be acquitted.

XANTHIAS

Would you mind that?

PHILOCLEON

Once at Delphi, the god, whom I was consulting, foretold, that if an accused man escaped me, I should die of consumption.

XANTHIAS

Apollo the Saviour, what a prophecy!

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I beseech you, if you do not want my death, let me go.

XANTHIAS

No, Philocleon, no never, by Posidon!

PHILOCLEON

Well then, I shall gnaw through the net with my teeth.

XANTHIAS

But you have no teeth.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! you rascal, how can I kill you? How? Give me a sword, quick, or a conviction tablet.

BDELYCLEON

Our friend is planning some great crime.

PHILOCLEON

No, by Zeus! but I want to go and sell my ass and its panniers, for it's the first of the month.

BDELYCLEON

Could I not sell it just as well?

PHILOCLEON

Not as well as I could.

BDELYCLEON

No, but better.

PHILOCLEON

Bring out the ass anyway.

XANTHIAS

What a clever excuse he has found now! What cunning to get you to let him go out!

BDELYCLEON

Yes, but I have not swallowed the hook; I scented the trick. I will go in and fetch the ass, so that the old man may not point his weapons that way again. (*He goes in, returning immediately with the ass.*) Stupid old ass, are you weeping because you are going to be sold? Come, go a bit quicker. Why, what are you moaning and groaning for? You might be carrying another Odysseus.

XANTHIAS

Why, certainly, so he is! someone has crept beneath his belly.

BDELYCLEON

Who, who? Let's see. Why it's he! What does this mean? Who are you? Come, speak!

PHILOCLEON

I am Noman.

BDELYCLEON

Noman? Of what country?

PHILOCLEON

Of Ithaca, son of Apodrasippides.

BDELYCLEON

Ha! Mister Noman, you will not laugh presently. Pull him out quick. Ah! the wretch, where has he crept to? Does he not resemble a she-ass to the life?

PHILOCLEON

If you do not leave me in peace, I shall sue.

BDELYCLEON

And what will the suit be about?

PHILOCLEON

The shade of an ass.[8]

BDELYCLEON

You are a poor man of very little wit, but thoroughly brazen.

PHILOCLEON

A poor man! Ah! by Zeus! you know not now what I am worth; but you will know when you disembowel the old Heliast's money-bag.

BDELYCLEON

Come, get back indoors, both you and your ass.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! my brethren of the tribunal! oh! Cleon! to the rescue!

BDELYCLEON

Go and bawl in there under lock and key. And you there, pile plenty of stones against the door, thrust the bolt home into the staple, and to keep this beam in its place roll that great mortar against it. Quick's the word.

XANTHIAS

Oh! my god! whence did this brick fall on me?

BDELYCLEON

Perhaps a rat loosened it.

XANTHIAS

A rat? it's surely our gutter-judge, who has crept beneath the tiles of the roof.

BDELYCLEON

Ah! woe to us! there he is, he has turned into a sparrow; he will be flying off. Where is the net? where? Shoo! shoo! get back! Ah! by Zeus! I would rather have to guard Scioné than such a father.

XANTHIAS

And now that we have driven him in thoroughly and he can no longer escape without our knowledge, can we not have a few winks of sleep, no matter how few?

BDELYCLEON

Why, wretch! the other jurymen will be here almost directly to summon my father!

XANTHIAS

Why, it's scarcely dawn yet!

BDELYCLEON

Ah, they must have risen late to-day. Generally it is the middle of the night when they come to fetch him. They arrive here, carrying lanterns in their hands and singing the charming old verses of Phrynichus' *Sidonian Women;* it's their way of calling him.

XANTHIAS

Well, if need be, we will chase them off with stones.

BDELYCLEON

What! you dare to speak so? Why, this class of old men, if irritated, becomes as terrible as a swarm of wasps. They carry below their loins the

sharpest of stings, with which to prick their foe; they shout and leap and their stings burn like so many sparks.

XANTHIAS

Have no fear! If I can find stones to throw into this nest of jurymen-wasps, I shall soon have them cleared off.

(*Enter the* CHORUS, *composed of old men costumed as wasps.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

March on, advance boldly and bravely! Comias, your feet are dragging; once you were as tough as a dog-skin strap and now even Charinades walks better than you. Ha! Strymodorus of Conthylé, you best of mates, where is Euergides and where is Chabes of Phlya? Ha, ha, bravo! there you are, the last of the lads with whom we mounted guard together at Byzantium. Do you remember how, one night, prowling round, we noiselessly stole the kneading-trough of a baker's wife; we split it in two and cooked our green-stuff with it.—But let us hasten, for the case of Laches comes on to-day, and they all say he has embezzled a pot of money. Hence Cleon, our protector, advised us yesterday to come early and with a three days' stock of fiery rage so as to chastise him for his crimes. Let us hurry, comrades, before it is light; come, let us search every nook with our lanterns to see whether those who wish us ill have not set us some trap.

BOY

Father, father, watch out for the mud.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Pick up a blade of straw and trim your lamp.

BOY

No, I can trim it quite well with my finger.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why do you pull out the wick, you little dolt? Oil is scarce, and it's not you who suffer when it has to be paid for. (*Strikes him.*)

BOY

If you teach us again with your fists, we shall put out the lamps and go home; then you will have no light and will squatter about in the mud like ducks in the dark.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I know how to punish offenders bigger than you. But I think I am treading in some mud. Oh! it's certain it will rain in torrents for four days at least; look at the snuff in our lamps; that is always a sign of heavy rain; but the rain and the north wind will be good for the crops that are still

standing. Why, what can have happened to our mate, who lives here? Why does he not come to join our party? There used to be no need to haul him in our wake, for he would march at our head singing the verses of Phrynichus; he was a lover of singing. Should we not, friends, make a halt here and sing to call him out? The charm of my voice will fetch him out, if he hears it.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Why does the old man not show himself before the door? Why does he not answer? Has he lost his shoes? has he stubbed his toe in the dark and thus got a swollen ankle? Perhaps he has a tumour in his groin. He was the hardest of us all; he alone *never* allowed himself to be moved. If anyone tried to move him, he would lower his head, saying, "You might just as well try to boil a stone." But I bethink me, an accused man escaped us yesterday through his false pretence that he loved Athens and had been the first to unfold the Samian plot. Perhaps his acquittal has so distressed Philocleon that he is abed with fever—he is quite capable of such a thing.—Friend, arise, do not thus vex your heart, but forget your wrath. To-day we have to judge a man made wealthy by treason, one of those who set Thrace free; we have to prepare him a funeral urn . . . so march on, my boy, get going.

(*Here a duet begins between the* BOY *and the* CHORUS.)

BOY

Father, would you give me something if I asked for it?

CHORUS

Assuredly, my child, but tell me what nice thing do you want me to buy you? A set of knuckle-bones, I suppose.

BOY

No, father, I prefer figs; they are better.

CHORUS

No, by Zeus! even if you were to hang yourself with vexation.

BOY

Well then, I will lead you no farther.

CHORUS

With my small pay, I am obliged to buy bread, wood, and stew; and now you ask me for figs!

BOY

But, father, if the Archon should not form a court to-day, how are we to buy our dinner? Have you some good hope to offer us or only "Hellé's sacred waves"?

CHORUS

Alas! alas! I have not a notion how we shall dine.

BOY

Oh! my poor mother! why did you let me see this day?

CHORUS

So that you might give me troubles to feed on.

BOY

Little wallet, you seem like to be a mere useless ornament!

BOY AND CHORUS

It is our destiny to groan.

PHILOCLEON (*appearing at an upper window; singing*)

My friends, I have long been pining away while listening to you from my window, but I absolutely know not what to do. I am detained here, because I have long wanted to go with you to the law-court and do all the harm I can. Oh! Zeus! cause the peals of thy thunder to roll, change me quickly into smoke or make me into a Proxenides, a tissue of falsehoods, like the son of Sellus. Oh, King of Heaven! hesitate not to grant me this favour, pity my misfortune or else may thy dazzling lightning instantly reduce me to ashes; then carry me hence, and may thy breath hurl me into some strong, hot marinade or turn me into one of the stones on which the votes are counted.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Who is it detains you and shuts you in? Speak, for you are talking to friends.

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

My son. But no bawling, he is there in front asleep; lower your voice.

CHORUS (*singing*)

But, poor fellow, what is his aim? what is his object?

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

My friends, he will not have me judge nor do anyone any ill, but he wants me to stay at home and enjoy myself, and I will not.

CHORUS (*singing*)

And does this wretch, this Demologocleon dare to say such odious things, just because you tell the truth about our navy? He would not have dared, had he not been a conspirator.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But meanwhile, you must devise some new dodge, so that you can come down here without his knowledge.

PHILOCLEON

But what? Try to find some way. For myself, I am ready for anything, so much do I burn to run along the tiers of the tribunal with my voting-pebble in my hand.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There is surely some hole through which you could manage to squeeze from within, and escape dressed in rags, like the crafty Odysseus.

PHILOCLEON

Everything is sealed fast; not so much as a gnat could get through. Think of some other plan; there is no possible hole of escape.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Do you recall how, when you were with the army at the taking of Naxos, you descended so readily from the top of the wall by means of the spits you had stolen?

PHILOCLEON

I remember that well enough, but what connection is there with present circumstances? I was young, clever at thieving, I had all my strength, none watched over me, and I could run off without fear. But to-day men-at-arms are placed at every outlet to watch me, and two of them are lying in wait for me at this very door armed with spits, just as folks lie in wait for a cat that has stolen a piece of meat.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Come, discover some way as quick as possible. Here is the dawn come, my dear little friend.

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

The best way is to gnaw through the net. Oh! goddess who watchest over the nets,[p] forgive me for making a hole in this one.

CHORUS (*singing*)

It's acting like a man eager for his safety. Get your jaws to work.

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

There! it's gnawed through! But no shouting! let Bdelycleon notice nothing!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Have no fear, have no fear! if he breathes a syllable, it will be to bruise his own knuckles; he will have to fight to defend his own head. We shall teach him not to insult the mysteries of the goddesses.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But fasten a rope to the window, tie it around your body and let yourself down to the ground, with your heart bursting with the fury of Diopithes.

PHILOCLEON

But if these notice it and want to fish me up and drag me back into the house, what will you do? Tell me that.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We shall call up the full strength of our oak-tough courage to your aid. That is what we will do.

PHILOCLEON

I trust myself to you and risk the danger. If misfortune overtakes me, take away my body, bathe it with your tears and bury it beneath the bar of the tribunal.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nothing will happen to you, rest assured. Come, friend, have courage and let yourself slide down while you invoke your country's gods.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! mighty Lycus! noble hero and my neighbour, thou, like myself, takest pleasure in the tears and the groans of the accused. If thou art come to live near the tribunal, 'tis with the express design of hearing them incessantly; thou alone of all the heroes hast wished to remain among those who weep. Have pity on me and save him, who lives close to thee; I swear I will never make water, never, nor ever let a fart, against the railing of thy statue.

(*He slides down as quietly as possible; nevertheless* BDELYCLEON *wakes up.*)

BDELYCLEON (*to* XANTHIAS)

Ho, there! ho! get up!

XANTHIAS (*waking up*)

What's the matter?

BDELYCLEON

I thought I heard talking close to me. Is the old man at it again, escaping through some loophole?

XANTHIAS

No, by Zeus! no, but he is letting himself down by a rope.

BDELYCLEON

Ha, rascal! what are you doing there? You shall not descend. (*To* XANTHIAS) Mount quick to the other window, strike him with the boughs that hang over the entrance; perhaps he will turn back when he feels himself being thrashed.

PHILOCLEON (*to the audience*)

To the rescue! all you, who are going to have lawsuits this year—Smicythion, Tisiades, Chremon and Pheredipnus. It's now or never, before they force me to return, that you must help.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why do we delay to let loose that fury, that is so terrible, when our nests are attacked?

CHORUS (*singing*)

I feel my angry sting is stiffening, that sharp sting, with which we punish our enemies. Come, children, cast your cloaks to the winds, run, shout, tell Cleon what is happening, that he may march against this foe of our city, who deserves death, since he proposes to prevent the trial of lawsuits.

(*The* BOYS *run off, taking the* CHORUS' *mantles with them.*)

BDELYCLEON (*rushing out of the house with the two slaves and seizing his father*)

Friends, listen to the truth, instead of bawling.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

By Zeus! we will shout to heaven.

BDELYCLEON

And I shall not let him go.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why, this is intolerable, 'tis manifest tyranny.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! citizens, oh! Theorus, the enemy of the gods! and all you flatterers, who rule us! come to our aid.

XANTHIAS

By Heracles! they have stings. Do you see them, master?

BDELYCLEON

It was with these weapons that they killed Philippus the son of Gorgias when he was put on trial.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And you too shall die. Turn yourselves this way, all, with your stings out for attack and throw yourselves upon him in good and serried order, and swelled up with wrath and rage. Let him learn to know the sort of foes he has dared to irritate.

XANTHIAS

The fight will be fast and furious, by great Zeus! I tremble at the sight of their stings.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Let this man go, unless you want to envy the tortoise his hard shell.

PHILOCLEON

Come, my dear companions, wasps with relentless hearts, fly against him, animated with your fury. Sting him in the arse, eyes, and fingers.

BDELYCLEON

(*opening the door and trying to shove his struggling father in*)

Midas, Phryx, Masyntias, here! Come and help. Seize this man and hand him over to no one, otherwise you shall starve to death in chains. Fear nothing, I have often heard the crackling of fig-leaves in the fire. [10]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you won't let him go, I shall bury this sting in your body.

PHILOCLEON

Oh, Cecrops, mighty hero with the tail of a dragon! Seest thou how these barbarians ill-use me—me, who have many a time made them weep a full bushel of tears?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Is not old age filled with cruel ills? What violence these two slaves offer to their old master! they have forgotten all bygones, the fur-coats and the jackets and the caps he bought for them; in winter he watched that their

feet should not get frozen. And only see them now; there is no gentleness in their look nor any recollection of the slippers of other days.

PHILOCLEON (*to* XANTHIAS)

Will you let me go, you accursed animal? Don't you remember the day when I surprised you stealing the grapes; I tied you to an olive-tree and I cut open your bottom with such vigorous lashes that folks thought you had been raped. Get away, you are ungrateful. But let go of me, and you too, before my son comes up.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You shall repay us for all this, and that soon. Tremble at our ferocious glance; you shall taste our just anger.

BDELYCLEON

Strike! strike! Xanthias! Drive these wasps away from the house.

XANTHIAS

That's just what I am doing.

BDELYCLEON

Blind them with smoke too!

XANTHIAS AND SOSIAS

You will not go? The plague seize you! Will you not clear off?

BDELYCLEON

Hit them with your stick Xanthias, and you Sosias, to smoke them out better, throw Aeschines, the son of Sellartius, on the fire.

XANTHIAS (*as the* CHORUS *retires from the unequal conquest*)

There, we were bound to drive you off sooner or later!

BDELYCLEON

Eh! by Zeus! you would not have put them to flight so easily if they had fed on the verses of Philocles.

CHORUS (*singing*)

It is clear to all the poor that tyranny has attacked us sorely. Proud emulator of Amynias, you, who only take pleasure in doing ill, see how you are preventing us from obeying the laws of the city; you do not even seek a pretext or any plausible excuse, but claim to rule alone.

BDELYCLEON

Hold! A truce to all blows and brawling! Had we not better confer together and come to some understanding?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Confer with you, the people's foe! with you, a royalist . . .

CHORUS (*singing*)

. . . and accomplice of Brasidas, you with your woollen-fringed coat and your long beard?

BDELYCLEON

Ah! it would be better to separate altogether from my father than to steer my boat daily through such stormy seas!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! you have but reached the parsley and the rue, to use the common saying.[11] What you are suffering is nothing! but welcome the hour when the advocate shall adduce all these same arguments against you and shall summon your accomplices to give witness.

BDELYCLEON

In the name of the gods! withdraw or we shall fight you the whole day long.

CHORUS (*singing*)

No, not as long as I retain an atom of breath. Ha! your desire is to tyrannize over us!

BDELYCLEON

Everything is now tyranny with us, no matter what is concerned, whether it be large or small. Tyranny! I have not heard the word mentioned once in fifty years, and now it is more common than salt-fish, the word is even current on the market. If you are buying gurnards and don't want anchovies, the huckster next door, who is selling the latter, at once exclaims, "That is a man whose kitchen savours of tyranny!" If you ask for onions to season your fish, the green-stuff woman winks one eye and asks, "Ha, you ask for onions! are you seeking to tyrannize, or do you think that Athens must pay you your seasonings as a tribute?"

XANTHIAS

Yesterday I went to see a whore about noon and told her to get on top; she flew into a rage, pretending I wanted to restore the tyranny of Hippias.[12]

BDELYCLEON

That's the talk that pleases the people! As for myself, I want my father to lead a joyous life like Morychus instead of going away before dawn basely to calumniate and condemn; and for this I am accused of conspiracy and tyrannical practice!

PHILOCLEON

And quite right too, by Zeus! The most exquisite dishes do not make up to me for the life of which you deprive me. I scorn your red mullet and your eels, and would far rather eat a nice little lawsuitlet cooked in the pot.

BDELYCLEON

That's because you have got used to seeking your pleasure in it; but if you will agree to keep silence and hear me, I think I could persuade you that you deceive yourself altogether.

PHILOCLEON

I deceive myself, when I am judging?

BDELYCLEON

You do not see that you are the laughing-stock of these men, whom you are ready to worship. You are their slave and do not know it.

PHILOCLEON

I a slave, I, who lord it over all?

BDELYCLEON

Not at all, you think you are ruling when you are only obeying. Tell me, father, what do you get out of the tribute paid by so many Greek towns.

PHILOCLEON

Much, and I appoint my colleagues jurymen.

BDELYCLEON

And I also. (*To the slaves*) Release him.

PHILOCLEON

And bring me a sword; If I am worsted in this debate, I shall fall on the blade.

BDELYCLEON

Tell me whether you will accept the verdict of the Court.

PHILOCLEON

May I never drink my Heliast's pay in honour of the Good Genius, if I do not.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Now it is necessary for you, who are of our school, to say something novel, that you may not seem . . .

BDELYCLEON (*interrupting*)

And I must note down everything he says, so as to remember it; someone bring me a tablet, quick.

CHORUS (*singing*)

. . . to side with this youth in his opinions. You see how serious the question has become; if he should prevail, which the gods forfend, it will be all over for us.

PHILOCLEON

But what will you say of it, if he *should* triumph in the debate?

CHORUS (*singing*)

That old men are no longer good for anything; we shall be perpetually laughed at in the streets, shall be called thallophores, mere brief-bags.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You are to be the champion of all our rights and sovereignty. Come, take courage! Bring into action all the resources of your wit.

PHILOCLEON

At the outset I will prove to you that there exists no king whose might is greater than ours. Is there a pleasure, a blessing comparable with that of a juryman? Is there a being who lives more in the midst of delights, who is more feared, aged though he be? From the moment I leave my bed, men of power, the most illustrious in the city, await me at the bar of the tribunal; the moment I am seen from the greatest distance, they come forward to offer me a gentle hand,—that has pilfered the public funds; they entreat me, bowing right low and with a piteous voice, "Oh, father," they say, "pity me, I adjure you by the profit *you* were able to make in the public service or in the army, when dealing with the victuals." Why, the man who speaks thus would not know of my existence, had I not let him off on some former occasion.

BDELYCLEON

Let us note this first point, the supplicants.

PHILOCLEON

These entreaties have appeased my wrath, and I enter—firmly resolved to do nothing that I have promised. Nevertheless I listen to the accused. Oh! what tricks to secure acquittal! Ah! there is no form of flattery that is not addressed to the Heliast! Some groan over their poverty and exaggerate it. Others tell us anecdotes or some comic story from Aesop. Others, again, cut jokes; they fancy I shall be appeased if

I laugh. If we are not even then won over, why, then they drag forward their young children by the hand, both boys and girls, who prostrate themselves and whine with one accord, and then the father, trembling as if before a god, beseeches me not to condemn him out of pity for them, "If you love the voice of the lamb, have pity on my sons"; and because I am fond of little sows,[13] I must yield to his daughter's prayers. Then we relax the heat of our wrath a little for him. Is not this great power indeed, which allows even wealth to be disdained?

BDELYCLEON

A second point to note, the disdain of wealth. And now recall to me what are the advantages you enjoy, you, who pretend to rule over Greece?

PHILOCLEON

We are entrusted with the inspection of the young men, and thus we have a right to examine their tools. If Oeagrus is accused, he is not acquitted before he has recited a passage from *'Niobé'* and he chooses the finest. If a flute-player gains his case, he adjusts his mouth-strap in return and plays us the final air while we are leaving. A father on his deathbed names some husband for his daughter, who is his sole heir; but we care little for his will or for the shell so solemnly placed over the seal; we give the young maiden to him who has best known how to secure our favour. Name me another duty that is so important and so irresponsible.

BDELYCLEON

Aye, it's a fine privilege, and the only one on which I can congratulate you; but surely to violate the will is to act badly towards the heiress.

PHILOCLEON

And if the Senate and the people have trouble in deciding some important case, it is decreed to send the culprits before the Heliasts; then Euathlus and the illustrious Colaconymus, who cast away his shield, swear not to betray us and to fight for the people. Did ever an orator carry the day with his opinion if he had not first declared that the jury should be dismissed for the day as soon as they had given their first verdict? We are the only ones whom Cleon, the great bawler, does not badger. On the contrary, he protects and caresses us; he keeps off the flies, which is what you have never done for your father. Theorus, who is a man not less illustrious than Euphemius, takes the sponge out of the pot and blacks our shoes. See then what good things you deprive and despoil me of. Pray, is this obeying or being a slave, as you pretended to be able to prove?

BDELYCLEON

Talk away to your heart's content; you must come to a stop at last and then you shall see that this grand power only resembles an anus; no matter how much you wash it, you can never get it clean.

PHILOCLEON

But I am forgetting the most pleasing thing of all. When I return home with my pay, everyone runs to greet me because of my money. First my daughter bathes me, anoints my feet, stoops to kiss me and, while she is calling me "her dearest father," fishes out my triobolus with her tongue; [11] then my little wife comes to wheedle me and brings a nice light cake; she sits beside me and entreats me in a thousand ways, "Do take this now; do have some more." All this delights me hugely, and I have no need to turn towards you or the steward to know when it shall please him to serve my dinner, all the while cursing and grumbling. But if he does not quickly knead my cake, I have something which is my defence, my shield against all ills. If you do not pour me out drink, I have brought this long-eared jar full of wine. How it brays, when I bend back and bury its neck in my mouth! It farts like a whole army, and how I laugh at your wine-skins. (*With increasing excitement*) As to power, am I not equal to the king of the gods? If our assembly is noisy, all say as they pass, "Great gods! the tribunal is rolling out its thunder!" If I let loose the lightning, the richest, aye, the noblest are half dead with terror and crap for fright. You yourself are afraid of me, yea, by Demeter! you are afraid. But may I die if *you* frighten *me*.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Never have I heard speech so elegant or so sensible.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! he thought he had only to turn me round his finger; he should, however have known the vigour of my eloquence.

CHORUS (*singing*)

He has said everything without omission. I felt myself grow taller while I listened to him. Methought myself meting out justice in the Islands of the Blest, so much was I taken with the charm of his words.

BDELYCLEON

How overjoyed they are! What extravagant delight! Ah! ah! you are going to get a thrashing to-day.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Come, plot everything you can to beat him; 'tis not easy to soften me if you do not talk on my side.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you have nothing but nonsense to spout, it's time to buy a good millstone, freshly cut withal, to crush my anger.

BDELYCLEON

The cure of a disease, so inveterate and so widespread in Athens, is a difficult task and of too great importance for the scope of comedy. Nevertheless, my old father . . .

PHILOCLEON

Cease to call me by that name, for, if you do not prove me a slave and that quickly too, you must die by my hand, even if I must be deprived of my share in the sacred feasts.

BDELYCLEON

Listen to me, dear little father, unruffle that frowning brow and reckon, you can do so without trouble, not with pebbles, but on your fingers, what is the sum-total of the tribute paid by the allied towns; besides this we have the direct imposts, a mass of percentage dues, the fees of the courts of justice, the produce from the mines, the markets, the harbours, the public lands and the confiscations. All these together amount to nearly two thousand talents. Take from this sum the annual pay of the dicasts; they number six thousand, and there have never been more in this town; so therefore it is one hundred and fifty talents that come to you.

PHILOCLEON

What! our pay is not even a tithe of the state revenue?

BDELYCLEON

Why no, certainly not.

PHILOCLEON

And where does the rest go then?

BDELYCLEON

To those who say: "I shall never betray the interests of the masses; I shall always fight for the people." And it is you, father, who let yourself be caught with their fine talk, who give them all power over yourself. They are the men who extort fifty talents at a time by threat and intimidation from the allies. "Pay tribute to me," they say, "or I shall loose the lightning on your town and destroy it." And you, you are content to gnaw the crumbs of your own might. What do the allies do? They see that the Athenian mob lives on the tribunal in niggard and miserable fashion, and they count you for nothing, for not more than the vote of Connus; it is on those wretches that they lavish everything, dishes of salt fish,

wine, tapestries, cheese, honey, sesamé-fruit, cushions, flagons, rich clothing, chaplets, necklets, drinking-cups, all that yields pleasure and health. And you, their master, to you as a reward for all your toil both on land and sea, nothing is given, not even a clove of garlic to eat with your little fish.

PHILOCLEON

No, undoubtedly not; I have had to send and buy some from Eucharides. But you told me I was a slave. Prove it then, for I am dying with impatience.

BDELYCLEON

Is it not the worst of all slaveries to see all these wretches and their flatterers, whom they gorge with gold, at the head of affairs? As for you, you are content with the three obols which they give you and which you have so painfully earned in the galleys, in battles and sieges. But what I stomach least is that you go to sit on the tribunal by order. Some young fairy, the son of Chaereas, to wit, enters your house wiggling his arse, foul with debauchery, on his straddling legs and charges you to come and judge at daybreak, and precisely to the minute. "He who presents himself after the opening of the Court," says he, "will not get the triobolus." But he himself, though he arrives late, will nevertheless get his drachma as a public advocate. If an accused man makes him some present, he shares it with a colleague and the pair agree to arrange the matter like two sawyers, one of whom pulls and the other pushes. As for you, you have only eyes for the public pay-clerk, and you see nothing.

PHILOCLEON

Can it be I am treated thus? Oh! what is it you are saying? You stir me to the bottom of my heart! I am all ears! I cannot express what I feel.

BDELYCLEON

Consider then; you might be rich, both you and all the others; I know not why you let yourself be fooled by these folk who call themselves the people's friends. A myriad of towns obey you, from the Euxine to Sardis. What do you gain thereby? Nothing but this miserable pay, and even that is like the oil with which the flock of wool is impregnated and is doled to you drop by drop, just enough to keep you from dying of hunger. They want you to be poor, and I will tell you why. It is so that you may know only those who nourish you, and so that, if it pleases them to loose you against one of their foes, you shall leap upon him with fury. If they wished to assure the well-being of the people, nothing would be easier for them. We have now a thousand towns that pay us tribute; let them com-

mand each of these to feed twenty Athenians; then twenty thousand of our citizens would be eating nothing but hare, would drink nothing but the purest of milk, and always crowned with garlands, would be enjoying the delights to which the great name of their country and the trophies of Marathon give them the right; whereas to-day you are like the hired labourers who gather the olives; you follow him who pays you.

PHILOCLEON

Alas! my hand is benumbed; I can no longer draw my sword. What has become of my strength?

BDELYCLEON

When they are afraid, they promise to divide Eubœa among you and to give each fifty bushels of wheat, but what have they given you? Nothing excepting, quite recently, five bushels of barley, and even these you have only obtained with great difficulty, on proving you were not aliens, and then choenix by choenix. (*With increasing excitement*) *That* is why I always kept you shut in; I wanted you to be fed by me and no longer at the beck of these blustering braggarts. Even now I am ready to let you have all you want, provided you no longer let yourself be suckled by the pay-clerk.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to* BDELYCLEON)

He was right who said, "Decide nothing till you have heard both sides," for now it seems to me that you are the one who gains the complete victory. My wrath is appeased and I throw away my sticks. (*To* PHILOCLEON) But, you, our comrade and contemporary . . .

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*taking this up in song*)

. . . let yourself be won over by his words; come, be not too obstinate or too perverse. Would that *I* had a relative or kinsman to correct me thus! Clearly some god is at hand and is now protecting you and loading you with benefits. Accept them.

BDELYCLEON

I will feed him, I will give him everything that is suitable for an old man; oatmeal gruel, a cloak, soft furs, and a wench to rub his tool and his loins. But he keeps silent and will not utter a sound; that's a bad sign.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

He has thought the thing over and has recognized his folly; he is reproaching himself for not having followed your advice always. But there he is, converted by your words, and wiser now, so that he will no doubt alter his ways in the future and always believe in none but you.

PHILOCLEON

Alas! alas!

BDELYCLEON

Now why this lamentation?

PHILOCLEON (*in tragic style*)

A truce to your promises! What I love is down there, down there I want to be, there, where the herald cries, "Who has not yet voted? Let him rise!" I want to be the last of all to leave the urn. Oh, my soul, my soul! where art thou? come! oh! dark shadows, make way for me! By Heracles, may I reach the court in time to convict Cleon of theft.

BDELYCLEON

Come, father, in the name of the gods, believe me!

PHILOCLEON

Believe you! Ask me anything, anything, except one.

BDELYCLEON

What is it? Let us hear.

PHILOCLEON

Not to judge any more! Before I consent, I shall have appeared before Pluto.

BDELYCLEON

Very well then, since you find so much pleasure in it, go down there no more, but stay here and deal out justice to your slaves.

PHILOCLEON

But what is there to judge? Are you mad?

BDELYCLEON

Everything as in a tribunal. If a servant opens a door secretly, you inflict upon him a simple fine; that's what you have repeatedly done down there. Everything can be arranged to suit you. If it is warm in the morning, you can judge in the sunlight; if it is snowing, then seated at your fire; if it rains, you go indoors; and if you don't rise till noon, there will be no Thesmothetes to exclude you from the precincts.

PHILOCLEON

The notion pleases me.

BDELYCLEON

Moreover, if a pleader is long-winded, you will not be hungering and chafing and seeking vengeance on the accused.

PHILOCLEON

But could I judge as well with my mouth full?

BDELYCLEON

Much better. Is it not said, that the dicasts, when deceived by lying witnesses, have need to ruminate well in order to arrive at the truth?

PHILOCLEON

Well said, but you have not told me yet who will pay my salary.

BDELYCLEON

I will.

PHILOCLEON

So much the better; in this way I shall be paid by myself. Because that damned jester, Lysistratus, played me an infamous trick the other day. He received a drachma for the two of us and went on the fish-market to get it changed and then brought me back three mullet scales. I took them for obols and crammed them into my mouth; but the smell choked me and I quickly spat them out. So I dragged him before the court.

BDELYCLEON

And what did he say to that?

PHILOCLEON

Well, he pretended I had the stomach of a cock. "You have soon digested the money," he said with a laugh.

BDELYCLEON

You see, that is yet another advantage.

PHILOCLEON

And no small one either. Come, do as you will.

BDELYCLEON

Wait! I will bring everything here.

(*He goes into the house.*)

PHILOCLEON (*to himself*)

You see, the oracles are coming true; I have heard it foretold, that one day the Athenians would dispense justice in their own houses, that each citizen would have himself a little tribunal constructed in his porch similar to the altars of Hecaté, and that there would be such before every door.

BDELYCLEON (*returning with slaves who are carrying various objects*)

There, what do you think of that? I have brought you everything

needful and much more into the bargain. See, here is a thunder-mug in case you have to pee; I shall hang it up beside you.

PHILOCLEON

Good idea! Right useful at my age. You have found the true alleviation of bladder troubles.

BDELYCLEON

Here is a fire, and near to it are lentils, should you want to have a bite to eat.

PHILOCLEON

That's admirably arranged. In this way, even when feverish, I shall nevertheless receive my pay; and besides, I could eat my lentils without quitting my seat. But why this cock?

BDELYCLEON

So that, should you doze during some pleading, he may awaken you by crowing up there.

PHILOCLEON

I want only for one thing more; all the rest is as good as can be.

BDELYCLEON

What is that?

PHILOCLEON

If only they could bring me an image of the hero Lycus.

BDELYCLEON

Here it is! Why, you might think it was the god himself!

PHILOCLEON

Oh! hero, my master! how repulsive you are to look at!

BDELYCLEON

He looks just like Cleonymus.

PHILOCLEON

That is why, hero though he be, he has no weapon.

BDELYCLEON

The sooner you take your seat, the sooner I shall call a case.

PHILOCLEON

Call it, for I have been seated ever so long.

BDELYCLEON

Let us see. What case shall we bring up first? Is there a slave who has done something wrong? Ah! you Thracian there, you burnt the stew-pot the other day.

PHILOCLEON

Wait, wait! This is a fine state of affairs! You almost made me judge without a bar, and that is the most sacred thing of all for us.

BDELYCLEON

There isn't any, by Zeus.

PHILOCLEON

I'll run indoors and get one myself. (*Exit*)

BDELYCLEON

What does it matter? Terrible thing, the force of habit.

XANTHIAS (*coming out of the house*)

Damn that animal! How can anyone keep such a dog?

BDELYCLEON

Hullo! what's the matter?

XANTHIAS

Oh, it's Labes, who has just rushed into the kitchen and seized a whole Sicilian cheese and gobbled it up.

BDELYCLEON

Good! this will be the first offence I shall make my father try. (*To* XANTHIAS) Come along and lay your accusation.

XANTHIAS

No, not I; the other dog vows he will be accuser, if the matter is brought up for trial.

BDELYCLEON

Well then, bring them both along.

XANTHIAS

That's what we'll have to do.

(*He goes back into the house. A moment later* PHILOCLEON *comes out.*)

BDELYCLEON

What is this?

PHILOCLEON

The pig-trough of the swine dedicated to Hestia.

BDELYCLEON

Did you steal it from a shrine?

PHILOCLEON

No, no, by addressing Hestia first, I might, thanks to her, crush an adversary. But put an end to delay by calling up the case. My verdict is already settled.

BDELYCLEON

Wait! I still have to bring out the tablets and the scrolls.

(*He goes into the house.*)

PHILOCLEON

Oh! I am boiling, I am dying with impatience at your delays. I could have traced the sentence in the dust.

BDELYCLEON (*coming out with tablets and scrolls*)

There you are.

PHILOCLEON

Then call the case.

BDELYCLEON

Right. Who is first on the docket?

PHILOCLEON

My god! This is unbearable! I have forgotten the urns.

BDELYCLEON

Now where are you going?

PHILOCLEON

To look for the urns.

BDELYCLEON

Don't bother, I have these pots.

PHILOCLEON

Very well, then we have all we need, except the clepsydra.

BDELYCLEON (*pointing to the thunder-mug*)

What is this if it is not a clepsydra?

PHILOCLEON

You know how to supply everything.

BDELYCLEON

Let fire be brought quickly from the house with myrtle boughs and incense, and let us invoke the gods before opening the sitting.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Offer them libations and your vows and we will thank them that a noble agreement has put an end to your bickerings and strife. And first let there be a sacred silence.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! god of Delphi! oh! Phoebus Apollo! convert into the greatest blessing for us all what is now happening before this house, and cure us of our error, oh, Paean, our helper!

BDELYCLEON (*solemnly*)

Oh! Powerful god, Apollo Aguieus, who watchest at the door of my entrance hall, accept this fresh sacrifice; I offer it that you may deign to soften my father's excessive severity; he is as hard as iron, his heart is like sour wine; do thou pour into it a little honey. Let him become gentle toward other men, let him take more interest in the accused than in the accusers, may he allow himself to be softened by entreaties; calm his acrid humour and deprive his irritable mind of all sting.

CHORUS (*singing*)

We unite our vows and chants to those of this new magistrate. His words have won our favour and we are convinced that he loves the people more than any of the young men of the present day.

(XANTHIAS *brings in two persons costumed as dogs, but with masks that suggest Laches and Cleon.*)

BDELYCLEON

If there be any judge near at hand, let him enter; once the proceedings have opened, we shall admit him no more.

PHILOCLEON

Who is the defendant?

BDELYCLEON

This one.

PHILOCLEON (*aside*)

He does not stand a chance.

BDELYCLEON

Listen to the indictment. A dog of Cydathenaea doth hereby charge Labes of Aexonia with having devoured a Sicilian cheese by himself without accomplices. Penalty demanded, a collar of fig-tree wood.

PHILOCLEON

Nay, a dog's death, if convicted.

BDELYCLEON

This is Labes, the defendant.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! what a wretched brute! how entirely he looks the rogue! He thinks to deceive me by keeping his jaws closed. Where is the plaintiff, the dog of Cydathenaea?

DOG

Bow wow! bow wow!

BDELYCLEON

Here he is.

PHILOCLEON

Why, he's another Labes, a great barker and a licker of dishes.

BDELYCLEON (*as Herald*)

Silence! Keep your seats! (*To the Cydathenaean dog.*) And you, up on your feet and accuse him.

PHILOCLEON

Go on, and I will help myself and eat these lentils.

DOG

Gentlemen of the jury, listen to this indictment I have drawn up. He has committed the blackest of crimes, against both me and the seamen. He sought refuge in a dark corner to glutton on a big Sicilian cheese, with which he sated his hunger.

PHILOCLEON

Why, the crime is clear; the filthy brute this very moment belched forth a horrible odour of cheese right under my nose.

DOG

And he refused to share with me. And yet can anyone style himself your benefactor, when he does not cast a morsel to your poor dog?

PHILOCLEON

He has not shared anything, not even with his comrade. His madness is as hot as my lentils.

BDELYCLEON

In the name of the gods, father! No hurried verdict without hearing the other side!

PHILOCLEON

But the evidence is plain; the fact speaks for itself.

DOG

Then beware of acquitting the most selfish of canine gluttons, who has devoured the whole cheese, rind and all, prowling round the platter.

PHILOCLEON

There is not even enough left for me to fill up the chinks in my pitcher.

DOG

Besides, you *must* punish him, because the same house cannot keep two thieves. Let me not have barked in vain, else I shall never bark again.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! the black deeds he has just denounced! What a shameless thief! Say, cock, is not that your opinion too? Ha, ha! He thinks as I do. Here, Thesmothetes! where are you? Hand me the thunder-mug.

BDELYCLEON

Get it yourself. I go to call the witnesses; these are a plate, a pestle, a cheese knife, a brazier, a stew-pot and other half-burnt utensils. (*To* PHILOCLEON) But you have not finished? you are piddling away still! Have done and be seated.

PHILOCLEON

Ha, ha! I reckon I know somebody who will crap for fright to-day.

BDELYCLEON

Will you never cease showing yourself hard and intractable, and especially to the accused? You tear them to pieces tooth and nail. (*To* LABES) Come forward and defend yourself. What means this silence? Answer.

PHILOCLEON

No doubt he has nothing to say.

BDELYCLEON

Not at all, I think he has got what happened once to Thucydides in court; his jaws suddenly set fast. Get away! I will undertake your defence.—Gentlemen of the jury, it is a difficult thing to speak for a dog who has been calumniated, but nevertheless I will try. He is a good dog, and he chases wolves finely.

PHILOCLEON

He is a thief and a conspirator.

BDELYCLEON

No, he is the best of all our dogs; he is capable of guarding a whole flock.

PHILOCLEON

And what good is that, if he eats the cheese?

BDELYCLEON

What? he fights for you, he guards your door; he is an excellent dog in every respect. Forgive him his larceny! he is wretchedly ignorant, he cannot play the lyre.

PHILOCLEON

I wish he did not know how to write either; then the rascal would not have drawn up his pleadings.

BDELYCLEON

Witnesses, I pray you, listen. Come forward, grating-knife, and speak up; answer me clearly. You were paymaster at the time. Did you grate out to the soldiers what was given you?—He says he did so.

PHILOCLEON

But, by Zeus! he lies.

BDELYCLEON

Oh! have patience. Take pity on the unfortunate. Labes feeds only on fish-bones and fishes' heads and has not an instant of peace. The other is good only to guard the house; he never moves from here, but demands his share of all that is brought in and bites those who refuse.

PHILOCLEON (*aside*)

Oh! Heaven! have I fallen ill? I feel my anger cooling! Woe to me! I am softening!

BDELYCLEON

Have pity, father, pity, I adjure you; you would not have him dead. Where are his puppies? (*A group of children costumed as puppies comes out.*) Come, poor little beasties, yap, up on your haunches, beg and whine!

PHILOCLEON

Descend, descend, descend, descend! [15]

BDELYCLEON

I will descend, although that word, "descend," has too often raised false hope. None the less, I will descend.

PHILOCLEON

Plague seize it! Have I then done wrong to eat! What! I, crying! Ah! I certainly should not be weeping, if I were not stuffed with lentils.

BDELYCLEON

Then he is acquitted?

PHILOCLEON

It is difficult to tell.

BDELYCLEON

Ah! my dear father, be good! be humane! Take this voting pebble and rush with your eyes closed to that second urn and, father, acquit him.

PHILOCLEON

No, I know no more how to acquit than to play the lyre.

BDELYCLEON

Come quickly, I will show you the way.

(*He takes his father by the hand and leads him to the second urn.*)

PHILOCLEON

Is this the first urn?

BDELYCLEON

Yes.

PHILOCLEON (*dropping in his vote*)

Then I have voted.

BDELYCLEON (*aside*)

I have fooled him and he has acquitted in spite of himself. (*To* PHILOCLEON) Come, I will turn out the urns.

PHILOCLEON

What is the result?

BDELYCLEON

We shall see. (*He examines both urns.*) Labes, you stand acquitted. (PHILOCLEON *faints*) Eh! father, what's the matter, what is it? (*To slaves*) Water! water! (*To* PHILOCLEON) Pull yourself together, sir!

PHILOCLEON (*weakly*)

Tell me! Is he really acquitted?

BDELYCLEON

Yes, certainly.

PHILOCLEON (*falling back*)

Then it's all over with me!

BDELYCLEON

Courage, dear father, don't let this afflict you so terribly.

PHILOCLEON (*dolefully*)

And so I have charged my conscience with the acquittal of an accused being! What will become of me? Sacred gods! forgive me. I did it despite myself; it is not in my character.

BDELYCLEON

Do not vex yourself, father; I will feed you well, will take you everywhere to eat and drink with me; you shall go to every feast; henceforth your life shall be nothing but pleasure, and Hyperbolus shall no longer have you for a tool. But come, let us go in.

PHILOCLEON (*resignedly*)

So be it; if you will, let us go in.

(*They all go into the house.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Go where it pleases you and may your happiness be great. (*The* CHORUS *turns and faces the audience.*) You meanwhile, oh! countless myriads, listen to the sound counsels I am going to give you and take care they are not lost upon you. That would be the fate of vulgar spectators, not that of such an audience. Hence, people, lend me your ear, if you love frank speaking.

The poet has a reproach to make against his audience; he says you have ill-treated him in return for the many services he has rendered you. At first he kept himself in the background and lent help secretly to other poets, and like the prophetic Genius, who hid himself in the belly of Eurycles, slipped within the spirit of another and whispered to him many a comic hit. Later he ran the risks of the theatre on his own account, with his face uncovered, and dared to guide his Muse unaided. Though overladen with success and honours more than any of your poets, indeed despite all his glory, he does not yet believe he has attained his goal; his heart is not swollen with pride and he does not seek to seduce the young folk in the wrestling school. If any lover runs up to him to complain be-

cause he is furious at seeing the object of his passion derided on the stage, he takes no heed of such reproaches, for he is inspired only with honest motives and his Muse is no pander. From the very outset of his dramatic career he has disdained to assail those who were men, but with a courage worthy of Heracles himself he attacked the most formidable monsters, and at the beginning went straight for that beast with the sharp teeth, with the terrible eyes that flashed lambent fire like those of Cynna, surrounded by a hundred lewd flatterers who spittle-licked him to his heart's content; he had a voice like a roaring torrent, the stench of a seal, the unwashed balls of a Lamia, and the arse of a camel. Our poet did not tremble at the sight of this horrible monster, nor did he dream of gaining him over; and again this very day he is fighting for your good. Last year besides, he attacked those pale, shivering and feverish beings who strangled your fathers in the dark, throttled your grandfathers, and who, lying in the beds of the most inoffensive, piled up against them lawsuits, summonses and witnesses to such an extent, that many of them flew in terror to the Polemarch for refuge. Such is the champion you have found to purify your country of all its evil, and last year you betrayed him, when he sowed the most novel ideas, which, however, did not strike root, because you did not understand their value; notwithstanding this, he swears by Bacchus, the while offering him libations, that none ever heard better comic verses. It is a disgrace to you not to have caught their drift at once; as for the poet, he is none the less appreciated by the *enlightened* judges. He shivered his oars in rushing boldly forward to board his foe. (*With increasing excitement*) But in future, my dear fellow-citizens, love and honour more those of your poets who seek to imagine and express some new thought. Make their ideas your own, keep them in your caskets like sweet-scented fruit. If you do, your clothing will emit an odour of wisdom the whole year through.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Ah, once long ago we were brave in the dance, brave too in battle, and on this account alone the most courageous of men! That was formerly, was formerly; all that is gone now and these hairs of ours are whiter than the swan. But from what is left we must rekindle a youthful ardour; really we prefer our old age to the curly hair and the fine clothes and the effeminacy of many of the young.

LEADER OF THE FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Should any among you spectators look upon me with wonder, because of this wasp waist, or not know the meaning of this sting, I will soon dispel his ignorance. We, who wear this appendage, are the true Attic men, who alone are noble and native to the soil, the bravest of all people. We

are the ones who, weapon in hand, did so much for the country, when the barbarian shed torrents of fire and smoke over our city in his relentless desire to seize our nests by force. At once we ran up, armed with lance and buckler, and, drunk with the bitter wine of anger, we gave them battle, man standing to man and rage distorting our lips. A hail of arrows hid the sky. However, by the help of the gods, we drove off the foe towards evening. Before the battle an owl had flown over our army. Then we pursued them with our lance-point in their loins as one hunts the tunny-fish; they fled and we stung them in the jaw and in the eyes, so that even now the barbarians tell each other that there is nothing in the world more to be feared than the Attic wasp.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! at that time I was terrible, I feared nothing; forth on my galleys I went in search of my foe and subjected him. Then we never thought of rounding fine phrases, we never dreamt of calumny; it was who should prove the strongest rower. And thus we took many a town from the Medes, and 'tis to us that Athens owes the tributes that our young men thieve to-day.

LEADER OF THE SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Look well at us, and you will see that we have all the character and habits of the wasp. Firstly, if roused, no beings are more irascible, more relentless than we are. In all other things, too, we act like wasps. We collect in swarms, in a kind of nests, and some go judging with the Archon, some with the Eleven, others at the Odeon; there are yet others, who hardly move at all, like the grubs in the cells, but remain glued to the walls, and bent double to the ground. We also pay full attention to the discovery of all sorts of means of existing and sting the first who comes, so as to live at his expense. Finally, we have among us drones, who have no sting and who, without giving themselves the least trouble, seize on our revenues as they flow past them and devour them. It's this that grieves us most of all, to see men who have never served or held either lance or oar in defence of their country, enriching themselves at our expense without ever raising a blister on their hands. In short, I give it as my deliberate opinion that in future every citizen not possessed of a sting shall not receive the triobolus.

(PHILOCLEON *comes out of the house, followed by his son and a slave. The* CHORUS *turns to face them.*)

PHILOCLEON

As long as I live, I will never give up this cloak; it's the one I wore in that battle when Boreas delivered us from such fierce attacks.

BDELYCLEON

You do not know what is good for you.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I do not know how to use fine clothing! The other day, when cramming myself with fried fish, I dropped so many grease spots that I had to pay three obols to the cleaner.

BDELYCLEON

At least have a try, since you have once for all handed the care for your well-being over to me.

PHILOCLEON

Very well then! what must I do?

BDELYCLEON

Take off your cloak, and put on this tunic in its stead.

PHILOCLEON

Was it worth while to beget and bring up children, so that this one should now wish to choke me?

BDELYCLEON

Come, take this tunic and put it on without so much talk.

PHILOCLEON

Great gods! what sort of a cursed garment is this?

BDELYCLEON

Some call it a pelisse, others a Persian cloak.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I thought it was a wraprascal like those made at Thymaetis.

BDELYCLEON

No wonder. It's only at Sardis you could have seen them, and you have never been there.

PHILOCLEON

Of course not, but it seems to me exactly like the mantle Morychus sports.

BDELYCLEON

Not at all; I tell you they are woven at Ecbatana.

PHILOCLEON

What! are there woollen ox-guts [16] then at Ecbatana?

BDELYCLEON

Whatever are you talking about? These are woven by the barbarians at great cost. I am certain this pelisse has consumed more than a talent of wool.

PHILOCLEON

It should be called wool-waster then instead of pelisse.

BDELYCLEON

Come, father, just hold still for a moment and put it on.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! horrors! what a waft of heat the hussy sends up my nose!

BDELYCLEON

Will you have done with this fooling?

PHILOCLEON

No by Zeus.

BDELYCLEON

But, good sir, . . .

PHILOCLEON

If need be, I prefer you should put me in the oven.

BDELYCLEON

Come, I will put it round you. There!

PHILOCLEON

At all events, bring out a crook.

BDELYCLEON

Why, whatever for?

PHILOCLEON

To drag me out of it before I am quite melted.

BDELYCLEON

Now take off those wretched clogs and put on these nice Laconian slippers.

PHILOCLEON

I put on odious slippers made by our foes! Never!

BDELYCLEON

Come! put your foot in and push hard. Quick!

PHILOCLEON

You're doing wrong here. You want me to put my foot on Laconian ground.

BDELYCLEON

Now the other.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! no, not that foot; one of its toes holds the Laconians in horror.

BDELYCLEON

Positively you must.

PHILOCLEON

Alas! alas! Then I shall have no chilblains in my old age.

BDELYCLEON

Now, hurry up and get them on; and now imitate the easy effeminate gait of the rich. See, like this.

(*He takes a few steps.*)

PHILOCLEON (*trying to do likewise*)

There! . . . Look at my get-up and tell me which rich man I most resemble in my walk.

BDELYCLEON

Why, you look like a garlic plaster on a boil.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I am longing to swagger and sway my arse about.

BDELYCLEON

Now, will you know how to talk gravely with well-informed men of good class?

PHILOCLEON

Undoubtedly.

BDELYCLEON

What will you say to them?

PHILOCLEON

Oh, lots of things. First of all I shall say, that Lamia, seeing herself caught, let flee a fart; then, that Cardopion and his mother . . .

BDELYCLEON

Come, no fabulous tales, pray! talk of realities, of domestic facts, as is usually done.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I know something that is indeed most domestic. Once upon a time there was a rat and a cat . . .

BDELYCLEON

"Oh, you ignorant fool," as Theagenes said to the dung-gatherer in a rage. Are you going to talk of cats and rats among high-class people?

PHILOCLEON

Then what should I talk about?

BDELYCLEON

Tell some dignified story. Relate how you were sent on a solemn mission with Androcles and Clisthenes.

PHILOCLEON

On a mission! never in my life, except once to Paros, a job which brought me in two obols a day.[17]

BDELYCLEON

At least say, that you have just seen Ephudion doing well in the pancratium with Ascondas and, that despite his age and his white hair, he is still robust in loin and arm and flank and that his chest is a very breast-plate.

PHILOCLEON

Stop! stop! what nonsense! Who ever contested at the pancratium with a breast-plate on?

BDELYCLEON

That is how well-behaved folk like to talk. But another thing. When at wine, it would be fitting to relate some good story of your youthful days. What is your most brilliant feat?

PHILOCLEON

My best feat? Ah! when I stole Ergasion's vine-props.

BDELYCLEON

You and your vine-props! you'll be the death of me! Tell of one of your boar-hunts or of when you coursed the hare. Talk about some torch-race you were in; tell of some deed of daring.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! my most daring deed was when, quite a young man still, I prosecuted Phayllus, the runner, for defamation, and he was condemned by a majority of two votes.

BDELYCLEON

Enough of that! Now recline there, and practise the bearing that is fitting at table in society.

PHILOCLEON

How must I recline? Tell me quick!

BDELYCLEON

In an elegant style.

PHILOCLEON (*lying on the ground*)

Like this?

BDELYCLEON

Not at all.

PHILOCLEON

How then?

BDELYCLEON

Spread your knees on the tapestries and give your body the most easy curves, like those taught in the gymnasium. Then praise some bronze vase, survey the ceiling, admire the awning stretched over the court. Water is poured over our hands; the tables are spread; we sup and, after ablution, we now offer libations to the gods.

PHILOCLEON

But, by Zeus! this supper is but a dream, it appears!

BDELYCLEON

The flute-player has finished the prelude. The guests are Theorus, Aeschines, Phanus, Cleon, Acestor; and beside this last, I don't know who else. You are with them. Shall you know exactly how to take up the songs that are started?

PHILOCLEON

Quite well.

BDELYCLEON

Really?

PHILOCLEON

Better than any born mountaineer of Attica.

BDELYCLEON

That we shall see. Suppose me to be Cleon. I am the first to begin the song of Harmodius, and you take it up: "There never yet was seen in Athens . . .

PHILOCLEON

. . . such a rogue or such a thief." [18]

BDELYCLEON

Why, you wretched man, it will be the end of you if you sing that. He will vow your ruin, your destruction, to chase you out of the country.

PHILOCLEON

Well! then I shall answer his threats with another song: "With your madness for supreme power, you will end by overthrowing the city, which even now totters towards ruin."

BDELYCLEON

And when Theorus, prone at Cleon's feet, takes his hand and sings, "Like Admetus, love those who are brave," what reply will you make him?

PHILOCLEON

I shall sing, "I know not how to play the fox, nor call myself the friend of both parties."

BDELYCLEON

Then comes the turn of Aeschines, the son of Sellus, and a well-trained and clever musician, who will sing, "Good things and riches for Clitagora and me and eke for the Thessalians!"

PHILOCLEON

"The two of us have squandered a great deal between us."

BDELYCLEON

At this game you seem at home. But come, we will go and dine with Philoctemon.—Slave! slave! place our dinner in a basket; we are going out for a good long drinking bout.

PHILOCLEON

By no means, it is too dangerous; for after drinking, one breaks in doors, one comes to blows, one batters everything. Anon, when the wine is slept off, one is forced to pay.

BDELYCLEON

Not if you are with decent people. Either they undertake to appease the offended person or, better still, you say something witty, you tell some comic story, perhaps one of those you have yourself heard at table, either in Aesop's style or in that of Sybaris; everyone laughs and the trouble is ended.

PHILOCLEON

Faith! it's worth while learning many stories then, if you are thus not punished for the ill you do. But come, no more delay!

(*They go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

More than once have I given proof of cunning and never of stupidity, but how much more clever is Amynias, the son of Sellus and of the race of forelock-wearers; him we saw one day coming to dine with Leogaras, bringing as his share one apple and a pomegranate, and bear in mind he was as hungry as Antiphon. He went on an embassy to Pharsalus, and there he lived solely among the Thessalian mercenaries; indeed, is he not the vilest of mercenaries himself?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! blessed, oh! fortunate Automenes, how enviable is your fortune! You have three sons, the most industrious in the world; one is the friend of all, a very able man, the first among the lyre-players, the favourite of the Graces. The second is an actor, and his talent is beyond all praise. As for Ariphrades, he is by far the most gifted; his father would swear to me, that without any master whatever and solely through the spontaneous effort of his happy nature, he taught himself to exercise his tongue in the whorehouses, where he spends the whole of his time.

Some have said that I and Cleon were reconciled. This is the truth of the matter: Cleon was harassing me, persecuting and belabouring me in every way; and, when I was being fleeced, the public laughed at seeing me uttering such loud cries; not that they cared about me, but simply curious to know whether, when trodden down by my enemy, I would not hurl at him some taunt. Noticing this, I have played the wheedler a bit; but now, look! the prop is deceiving the vine!

(XANTHIAS *enters, weeping and wailing and rubbing his sides.*)

XANTHIAS

Oh! tortoises! happy to have so hard a skin! Oh! creatures full of sense! what a happy thought to cover your bodies with this shell, which shields it from blows! As for me, I can no longer move; the stick has so belaboured my body.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why, what's the matter, my child? for, old as he may be, one has the right to call anyone a child who has let himself be beaten.

XANTHIAS

Alas! my master is really the worst of all plagues. He was the most drunk of all the guests, and yet among them were Hippyllus, Antiphon, Lycon, Lysistratus, Theophrastus and Phrynichus. But he was a hundred times more insolent than any. As soon as he had stuffed himself with a host of good dishes, he began to leap and spring, to laugh and to fart like a little ass well stuffed with barley. Then he set to beating me with all his heart, shouting, "Slave! slave!" Lysistratus, as soon as he saw him, let fly this comparison at him. "Old fellow," said he, "you resemble one of the scum assuming the airs of a rich man or a stupid ass that has broken loose from its stable." "As for you," bawled the other at the top of his voice, "you are like a grasshopper, whose cloak is worn to the thread, or like Sthenelus after his clothes had been sold." All applauded excepting Theophrastus, who made a grimace as behoved a well-bred man like him. The old man called to him, "Hi! tell me then what you have to be proud of? Not so much mouthing, you, who so well know how to play the buffoon and to lick-spittle the rich!" In this way he insulted each in turn with the grossest of jests, and he reeled off a thousand of the most absurd and ridiculous speeches. At last, when he was thoroughly drunk, he started towards here, striking everyone he met. Wait, here he comes reeling along. I will be off for fear of his blows.

(PHILOCLEON *enters, inebriated and hilarious, carrying a torch; his other hand is occupied with a wholly nude flute-girl; he is followed by a group of angry victims of his exuberance.*)

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

Halt! and let everyone begone, or I shall do an evil turn to some of those who insist on following me. Clear off, rascals, or I shall roast you with this torch!

GUEST

We shall all make you smart to-morrow for your youthful pranks. We shall come in a body to summon you to justice.

PHILOCLEON (*singing*)

Ho! ho! summon *me*? what old women's babble! Know that I can no longer bear to hear even the name of suits. Ha! ha! ha! *this* is what pleases *me*, "Down with the urns!" Get out of here! Down with the dicasts! away with them, away with them!

(*Dropping into speech; to the flute-girl*)

Mount up there, my little gilded cock-chafer; take hold of this rope's end in your hand. Hold it tight, but have a care; the rope's a bit old and worn. But even though it's worn, it still has its virtues. Do you see how opportunely I got you away from the solicitations of those fellators, who wanted you to make love to them in their own odd way? You therefore owe me this return to gratify me. But will you pay the debt? Oh! I know well you will not even try; you will play with me, you will laugh heartily at me as you have done at many another man. And yet, if you would not be a naughty girl, I would redeem you, when my son is dead, and you should be my concubine, my little one. At present I am not my own master; I am very young and am watched very closely. My dear son never lets me out of his sight; he's an unbearable creature, who would quarter a thread and skin a flint; he is afraid I should get lost, for I am his only father. But here he comes running towards us. But be quick, don't stir, hold these torches. I am going to play him a young man's trick, the same as he played me before I was initiated into the mysteries.

BDELYCLEON

Oh! oh! you debauched old dotard! you are amorous, it seems, of pretty baggages; but, by Apollo, it shall not be with impunity!

PHILOCLEON

Ah! you would be very glad to eat a lawsuit in vinegar, you would.

BDELYCLEON

Only a rascal would steal the flute-girl away from the other guests.

PHILOCLEON

What flute-girl? Are you distraught, as if you had just returned from Pluto?

BDELYCLEON

By Zeus! But here is the Dardanian wench in person.

PHILOCLEON

Nonsense. This is a torch that I have lit in the public square in honour of the gods.

BDELYCLEON

Is this a torch?

PHILOCLEON

A torch? Certainly. Do you not see it is of several different colours?

BDELYCLEON

And what is that black part in the middle?

PHILOCLEON

That's the pitch running out while it burns.

BDELYCLEON

And there, on the other side, surely that is a girl's bottom?

PHILOCLEON

No. That's just a small bit of the torch, that projects.

BDELYCLEON

What do you mean? what bit? Hi! you woman! come here!

PHILOCLEON

Oh! What do you want to do?

BDELYCLEON

To take her away from you and lead her off. You are too much worn out and can do nothing.

(*He takes the girl into the house.*)

PHILOCLEON

Listen to me! One day, at Olympia, I saw Euphudion boxing bravely against Ascondas; he was already aged, and yet with a blow from his fist he knocked down his young opponent. So watch out that I don't blacken *your* eyes.

BDELYCLEON (*who has returned*)

By Zeus! you have Olympia at your finger-ends!

(*A* BAKER'S WIFE *enters with an empty basket; she brings* CHAEREPHON *with her as witness.*)

BAKER'S WIFE (*to* CHAEREPHON)

Come to my help, I beg you, in the name of the gods! This cursed man, when striking out right and left with his torch, knocked over ten loaves worth an obolus apiece, and then, to cap the deal, four others.

BDELYCLEON

Do you see what lawsuits you are drawing upon yourself with your drunkenness? You will have to plead.

PHILOCLEON

Oh, no, no! a little pretty talk and pleasant tales will soon settle the matter and reconcile her with me.

BAKER'S WIFE

Not so, by the goddesses twain! It shall not be said that you have with impunity spoilt the wares of Myrtia, the daughter of Ancylion and Sostraté.

PHILOCLEON

Listen, woman, I wish to tell you a lovely anecdote.

BAKER'S WIFE

By Zeus, no anecdotes for me, thank you.

PHILOCLEON

One night Aesop was going out to supper. A drunken bitch had the impudence to bark near him. Aesop said to her, "Oh, bitch, bitch! you would do well to sell your wicked tongue and buy some wheat."

BAKER'S WIFE

You make a mock of me! Very well! I don't care who you are, I shall summons you before the market inspectors for damage done to my business. Chaerephon here shall be my witness.

PHILOCLEON

But just listen, here's another will perhaps please you better. Lasus and Simonides were contesting against each other for the singing prize. Lasus said, "Damned if I care."

BAKER'S WIFE

Ah! really, did he now!

PHILOCLEON

As for you, Chaerephon, *can* you be witness to this woman, who looks as pale and tragic as Ino when she throws herself from her rock . . . at the feet of Euripides?

(*The* BAKER'S WIFE *and* CHAEREPHON *depart.*)

BDELYCLEON

Here, I suppose, comes another to summons you; *he* has his witness too. Ah! unhappy indeed we are!

(*A badly bruised man enters.*)

ACCUSER

I summons you, old man, for outrage.

BDELYCLEON

For outrage? Oh! in the name of the gods, do not summons him! I will be answerable for him; name the price and I will be more more grateful still.

PHILOCLEON

I ask for nothing better than to be reconciled with him; for I admit I struck him and threw stones at him. So, first come here. Will you leave it in my hands to name the indemnity I must pay, if I promise you my friendship as well, or will you fix it yourself?

ACCUSER

Fix it; I like neither lawsuits nor disputes.

PHILOCLEON

A man of Sybaris fell from his chariot and wounded his head most severely; he was a very poor driver. One of his friends came up to him and said, "Every man to his trade." Well then, go you to Pittalus to get mended.

BDELYCLEON

You are incorrigible.

ACCUSER (*to his witness*)

At all events, make a note of his reply. (*They start to leave.*)

PHILOCLEON

Listen, instead of going off so abruptly. A woman at Sybaris broke a box.

ACCUSER (*to his witness*)

I again ask you to witness this.

PHILOCLEON

The box therefore had the fact attested, but the woman said, "Never worry about witnessing the matter, but hurry off to buy a cord to tie it together with; that will be the more sensible course."

ACCUSER

Oh! go on with your ribaldry until the Archon calls the case.

(*He and his witness depart.*)

BDELYCLEON (*to* PHILOCLEON)

By Demeter! you'll stay here no longer! I am going to take you and carry you off.

PHILOCLEON

And what for?

BDELYCLEON

What for? I am going to carry you into the house, so that the accusers will not run out of witnesses.

PHILOCLEON

One day at Delphi, Aesop . . .

BDELYCLEON

I don't care a fig for that.

PHILOCLEON

. . . was accused of having stolen a sacred vase. But he replied, that the horn-beetle . . .

BDELYCLEON

Oh, dear, dear! You'll drive me crazy with your horn-beetle.

(PHILOCLEON *goes on with his fable while* BDELYCLEON *is carrying him off the scene by main force.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

I envy you your happiness, old man. What a contrast to his former frugal habits and his very hard life! Taught now in quite another school, he will know nothing but the pleasures of ease. Perhaps he will jibe at it, for indeed it is difficult to renounce what has become one's second nature. However, many have done it, and adopting the ideas of others, have changed their use and wont. As for Philocleon's son, I, like all wise and judicious men, cannot sufficiently praise his filial tenderness and his tact. Never have I met a more amiable nature, and I have conceived the greatest fondness for him. How he triumphed on every point in his discussion with his father, when he wanted to bring him back to more worthy and honourable tastes!

XANTHIAS (*coming out of the house*)

By Bacchus! Some Evil Genius has brought this unbearable disorder into our house. The old man, full up with wine and excited by the sound of the flute, is so delighted, so enraptured, that he is spending the night executing the old dances that Thespis first produced on the stage, and just now he offered to prove to the modern tragedians, by disputing with them for the dancing prize, that they are nothing but a lot of old dotards.

(BDELYCLEON *comes out of the house with his father who is costumed as* POLYPHEMUS *in Euripides'* Cyclops.)

PHILOCLEON

"Who loiters at the door of the vestibule?"

XANTHIAS

Here comes our pest, our plague!

PHILOCLEON

Let down the barriers. The dance is now to begin.

(*He begins to dance in a manner grotesquely parodying that of Euripides.*)

XANTHIAS

Or rather the madness.

PHILOCLEON

Impetuous movement already twists and racks my sides. How my nostrils wheeze! how my back cracks!

XANTHIAS

Go and fill yourself with hellebore.

PHILOCLEON

Phrynichus is as bold as a cock and terrifies his rivals.

XANTHIAS

He'll be stoned.

PHILOCLEON

His leg kicks out sky-high . . .

XANTHIAS

. . . and his arse gapes open.

PHILOCLEON

Mind your own business. Look how easily my leg-joints move. Isn't that good?

XANTHIAS

God, no, it's merely insane!

PHILOCLEON

And now I summon and challenge my rivals. If there be a tragic poet who pretends to be a skilful dancer, let him come and contest the matter with me. Is there one? Is there *not* one?

XANTHIAS

Here comes one, and one only.

(*A very small dancer, costumed as a crab, enters.*)

PHILOCLEON

Who is the wretch?

XANTHIAS

The younger son of Carcinus.

PHILOCLEON

I will crush him to nothing; in point of keeping time, I will knock him out, for he knows nothing of rhythm.

XANTHIAS

Ah! ah! here comes his brother too, another tragedian, and another son of Carcinus.

(*Another dancer, hardly larger than the first, and similarly costumed, enters.*)

PHILOCLEON

Him I will devour for my dinner.

XANTHIAS

Oh! ye gods! I see nothing but crabs. Here is yet another son of Carcinus.

(*A third dancer enters, likewise resembling a crab, but smaller than either of the others.*)

PHILOCLEON

What's this? A shrimp or a spider?

XANTHIAS

It's a crab,—a hermit-crab, the smallest of its kind; it writes tragedies.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! Carcinus, how proud you should be of your brood! What a crowd of kinglets have come swooping down here! But we shall have to measure ourselves against them. Have marinade prepared for seasoning them, in case I prove the victor.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us stand out of the way a little, so that they may twirl at their ease.

CHORUS

(*It divides in two and accompanies with its song the wild dancing of* PHILOCLEON *and the sons of* CARCINUS *in the centre of the Orchestra.*)

Come, illustrious children of this inhabitant of the brine, brothers of the shrimps, skip on the sand and the shore of the barren sea; show us the lightning whirls and twirls of your nimble limbs. Glorious offspring of Phrynichus, let fly your kicks, so that the spectators may be overjoyed at seeing your legs so high in air. Twist, twirl, tap your bellies, kick your legs to the sky. Here comes your famous father, the ruler of the sea, delighted to see his three lecherous kinglets.[19] Go on

with your dancing, if it pleases you, but as for us, we shall not join you. Lead us promptly off the stage, for never a comedy yet was seen where the Chorus finished off with a dance.

1. The reference is to Cleon; see the Glossary.

2. A pun on the Greek words *démos,* "people" and *demós,* "fat." Aristophanes has used this before; see note 13 on *The Knights.*

3. "Going to the crows" was the ancient way of "going to Hell."

4. The implication is that certain other poets had sought to gain the favour of the audience by incorporating in their comedies scenes in which such distributions were made.

5. The poet has consoled himself by ascribing the failure of *The Clouds* the year before to the stupidity of the spectators, and there is no reason to doubt that there was much in that comedy which baffled or eluded the vulgar comprehension; but the principal defects of the play cannot correctly be placed in this category, nor can its failure be plausibly deduced from this cause.

6. One of the methods by which a juryman signified the vote for condemnation was the tracing of a line horizontally across a waxed tablet; the other involved the use of a pebble, which was dropped in one or the other of two urns, that of conviction or that of acquittal.

7. The wood of the fig-tree, when burned, gives off the most acrid smoke, and thus is eminently suited to the proud sourness of Philocleon's temper.

8. "To quarrel over the shade of an ass" meant to dispute about next to nothing. The ancients explained the origin of this idiom by an aetiological tale of a traveller who had hired an ass and, being observed by the owner resting in the shade which the animal cast, was sued by that imaginative and avaricious individual on the ground that it had been the ass and not its shade that the traveller had hired.

9. The goddess here invoked is Artemis.

10. "The crackling of fig-leaves in the fire" meant much ado about nothing.

11. "The parley and the rue" signified the mere beginnings of anything.

12. The name Hippias contains the stem of the Greek word for horse (*hippos*). This remark and those of Bdelycleon in the preceding speech suggest that the word tyranny was in Aristophanes' day used as frequently and as loosely as fascism and communism are today.

13. A pun on the Greek word *choiros,* which means both "sow" and "female genitalia." Aristophanes had made extensive use of this ambiguous word in one of the best scenes in *The Acharnians* (765–817).

14. Those in the ancient world who were too poor to afford a purse were wont to carry small coins in their mouths.

15. When the jurymen had been deeply moved by the pleading of the accused and had decided on acquittal, they commanded him to descend from the rostrum; apparently this was by no means an infallible indication of acquittal, and the accused had the right to finish his speech.

16. Philocleon is comparing the thick and shaggy cloth of the pelisse to the intestines of an ox, which have a crinkly appearance.

17. The mention of the salary gives away the fact that it was merely as a common soldier that Philocleon had been sent to Paros.

18. In all three cases where Philocleon finishes the line he adds something unpleasantly appropriate to the guest who is supposed to have led off the song.

19. A pun on the Greek words *triarchoi,* "three kings" and *triorchoi,* "having three testicles," i.e., endowed with 50% more sexuality than normal.

V
PEACE

Characters in the Play

Trygaeus
Two Servants of Trygaeus
Daughters of Trygaeus
Hermes
War
Tumult
Hierocles, *a Soothsayer*
An Armourer
A Sickle-maker
A Crest-maker
Son of Lamachus
Son of Cleonymus
Chorus of Husbandmen

INTRODUCTION

AT THE Great Dionysia of 421 Aristophanes ushered in the best period of his extant work with *Peace*, which won the second prize, the first going to *The Flatterers* of Eupolis. The verdict of the audience, if just, is to be construed entirely as testimony to the superlative excellence of the older dramatist's production, and in no sense as a slur on what is very nearly the most delightful of the eleven comedies of Aristophanes that have come down to us. The play exhibits signs of having been hastily composed, but the infectious gaiety and spontaneous warmth with which it is so liberally endowed are attributable less to an impromptu composition than to the sentiments which the events and the hopes of the time had inspired in the poet's heart.

The war of the Athenians with the Peloponnesians had begun as long ago as 431, and a decade of fighting had sorely afflicted the inhabitants of the rural districts of Attica. The frequent invasions of the Lacedæmonians had compelled them to relinquish their ancestral farms and their beloved rustic life and to find such habitation as they could in the congested city, from whose walls they might tearfully observe the destruction of their houses and the devastation of their fields. But a powerful Peace Party, which they and their urban sympathizers might have organized, was forestalled of its effectiveness by the chicanery of the demagogues and the success of the navy. The repeated proposals of Sparta for a cessation of hostilities were haughtily rejected, and it was only in 422, when Athens had experienced two years of military reverses and Cleon had been killed in battle, that a definitely pacifistic policy was actively adopted. Sparta likewise, in spite of her recent successes, was known to be just as weary of the war as her opponent, and there was thus, in the early months of 421, every reason to anticipate a favourable issue of the negotiations that had been opened in the latter part of the previous year.

The second of the three peace-comedies was thus composed in an atmosphere radically different from that which attended the production of *The Acharnians* four years earlier, and the two plays show little similarity in their emotional colouring. The later comedy has little of satire in it; its

author is too happy for that, and what he has written is at once a hymn of thanksgiving, a dance of joy, and a bright revery of future felicity.

The opening of the play presents us with two slaves of Trygaeus, who are breathlessly kneading cakes of excrement and feeding them to a dung-beetle which their master is keeping in his stable. Like Dicaeopolis in *The Acharnians,* he has despaired of obtaining peace through ordinary legislative channels and has resolved to do something about it himself, but his sentiments are more panhellenic and his project more fantastic than those of the earlier pacifist, for he has resolved to go to none other than Zeus himself in order to put an end to the war. A previous effort to climb to the divine residence on ladders has netted him nothing more than a broken head, and he now proposes to fly to heaven on the back of his malodorous and economical Pegasus.

The journey is negotiated with complete success, and at the door of the palace of Zeus he is rudely accosted by Hermes, from whom, after an easy propitiation, he learns of the disappointing state of affairs which the war has brought about in the celestial regions. The stupidities of the Greeks have utterly exhausted the patience of the gods, and they have moved away, as far away as possible, leaving their mortal subjects to the mercy of War and his slave Tumult. The first act of the new master of Hellenic affairs has been to cast Peace into a deep pit and then to heap numerous stones on her. He has then procured a huge mortar, in which he intends to grind up the cities of Greece into a wretched paste. No sooner has Hermes reported this than the villain himself appears and begins to realize his gruesome intentions; the cities, represented by their most noted products, are one by one tossed into the mortar, but the malignant god lacks a pestle and experiences difficulties in obtaining one. Both Sparta and Athens have lost theirs; Cleon and Brasidas are dead now. Thus the horrible fate of Greece is momentarily averted and War departs to make his own pestle.

Trygaeus, emerging from his hiding-place, realizes that he must liberate Peace immediately or else relinquish all hope of ever seeing her again, and he therefore summons to his aid a number of labourers and farmers from all parts of Greece. The Chorus now enters, highly and, under the circumstances, perilously elated at the prospect of putting an end to the war. When quiet has finally been restored and the objections of Hermes have melted away at the promise of future glory and sacrifices, the difficult task of extricating Peace is undertaken, with great enthusiasm and greater inefficiency. The difficulties are delightfully Hellenic; the Boeotians are only pretending; Lamachus is in the way; the Argives laugh at the others while they profit from their troubles; the Megarians are trying hard, but are too undernourished to be of much use; some of the Greeks are pulling

one way and some another; the Laconians do their part, along with the Athenians, but even here it is only the farmers that are doing any real work. Through *their* exertions Peace is at last hauled out of the pit, along with Opora and Theoria, and Trygaeus starts on his return journey to the earth, taking Opora to his marriage-bed and Theoria to the Senate. The Chorus now delivers the parabasis.

The anapests recite Aristophanes' claims to distinction as a comic poet. The ode begs the Muse to bring peace and attacks Carcinus and his sons as tragic poets. The antode extends this attack to others. The parabasis is incomplete, lacking the epirrhemes. Nor are these the only evidences of hurried writing, for in the anapests four lines are used verbatim from the parabasis of *The Wasps*, and the material generally is not new. More significant is the fact that indications of hasty composition are found nowhere else in the play, which would suggest that the parabases of most of the comedies were written last, after all the rest had been finished, and were thus regarded by the poet as something separate and independent.

At the conclusion of the parabasis Trygaeus comes limping in with Opora and Theoria, and almost immediately sets about preparing to enjoy the peace which he has obtained. Opora is taken into his house to be bathed and dressed for the wedding, Theoria is presented to the Senate, and a gala feast is begun. While Trygaeus and his servant are roasting the meat a belligerent soothsayer appears, mouthing oracles about the impossibility of ending the war (these were sounder prophecies than Aristophanes then realized), and trying by persuasion and by fraud to get a share of the feast. He is followed by a man who has been economically hard pressed by the war, a sickle-maker, who gratefully presents Trygæus with a large number of his products. Right on his heels comes a large group of the least pitiable victims of the peace, those most detestable of war-time profiteers, the manufacturers of armaments, whose spokesman strives vainly to realize a little something out of the large and unmarketable stocks which the sudden cessation of hostilities has left on their hands. Trygaeus rejects their offers with no less alacrity than scorn, and after the sons of Lamachus and Cleonymus have sung snatches of songs suited to their fathers' characters, Opora is brought out, and the comedy ends with the singing of the *Hymen Hymenaeus*.

A bare and compendious outline of its plot inevitably and always preserves the frame and omits the picture of an Aristophanic comedy, but such a presentation does a greater injustice to *Peace* than to any of the other plays, for its charm and its excellence reside less in the plot and its incidents than in the quality of their treatment and the freshness of their atmosphere. From this point of view *Peace* is at once a development out of

the youthful exuberance of *The Acharnians* and a prelude to the mature perfection of *The Birds*. When he composed it the poet was exulting in the fine first flush of a happiness that he was never again to experience, and, confidently anticipating a return to the pristine joys of rural life, he produced a comedy that is saturated with sunshine and redolent of the country-side. Trygaeus is not Dicaeopolis, and Aristophanes would not again so thoroughly speak his mind through the mouth of one of his characters; but neither *The Acharnians* nor any other play as a whole contains so full a measure of its author's heart as does *Peace*. Where Aristophanes is happiest, there is he most candid also, and it is thus particularly gratifying to observe the truth of the further proposition that where he is happiest, there is he bawdiest also. That the scholars of the nineteenth century should have been unable or unwilling to understand what *Peace* so plainly declares about the most delightful side of Aristophanes' nature is less surprising than revealing.

PEACE

(SCENE:—*Behind the Orchestra on the right the farmhouse of* TRYGAEUS, *in the centre the mouth of a cave closed up with huge boulders, on the left the palace of* ZEUS. *In front of the farmhouse is a stable, the door of which is closed. Two of* TRYGAEUS' *slaves are seen in front of the stable, one of them kneading cakes of dung, the other taking the finished cakes and throwing them into the stable.*)

FIRST SERVANT

QUICK, quick, bring the dung-beetle his cake.

SECOND SERVANT

There it is. Give it to him, and may it kill him! And may he never eat a better.

FIRST SERVANT

Now give him this other one kneaded up with ass's dung.

SECOND SERVANT

There! I've done that too. And where's what you gave him just now? Surely he can't have devoured it yet!

FIRST SERVANT

Indeed he has; he snatched it, rolled it between his feet and bolted it. Come, hurry up, knead up a lot and knead them stiffly.

SECOND SERVANT

Oh, scavengers, help me in the name of the gods, if you do not wish to see me fall down choked.

FIRST SERVANT

Come, come, another made from the stool of a fairy's favourite. That will be to the beetle's taste; he likes it well ground.

SECOND SERVANT

There! I am free at least from suspicion; none will accuse me of tasting what I mix.

FIRST SERVANT

Faugh! come, now another! keep on mixing with all your might.

SECOND SERVANT

By god, no. I can stand this awful cesspool stench no longer.

FIRST SERVANT

I shall bring you the whole ill-smelling gear.

SECOND SERVANT

Pitch it down the sewer sooner, and yourself with it. (*To the* AUDIENCE) Maybe, one of you can tell me where I can buy a stopped-up nose, for there is no work more disgusting than to mix food for a dung-beetle and to carry it to him. A pig or a dog will at least pounce upon our excrement without more ado, but this foul wretch affects the disdainful, the spoilt mistress, and won't eat unless I offer him a cake that has been kneaded for an entire day. . . . But let us open the door a bit ajar without his seeing it. Has he done eating? Come, pluck up courage, cram yourself till you burst! The cursed creature! It wallows in its food! It grips it between its claws like a wrestler clutching his opponent, and with head and feet together rolls up its paste like a rope-maker twisting a hawser. What an indecent, stinking, gluttonous beast! I don't know what angry god let this monster loose upon us, but of a certainty it was neither Aphrodité nor the Graces.

FIRST SERVANT

Who was it then?

SECOND SERVANT

No doubt Zeus, the God of the Thundercrap.[1]

FIRST SERVANT

But perhaps some spectator, some beardless youth, who thinks himself a sage, will say, "What is this? What does the beetle mean?" And then an Ionian, sitting next him, will add, "I think it's an allusion to Cleon, who so shamelessly feeds on filth all by himself."—But now I'm going indoors to fetch the beetle a drink.

SECOND SERVANT

As for me, I will explain the matter to you all, children, youths, grown-ups and old men, aye, even to the decrepit dotards. My master is mad,

not as you are, but with another sort of madness, quite a new kind. The livelong day he looks open-mouthed towards heaven and never stops addressing Zeus. "Ah! Zeus," he cries, "what are thy intentions? Lay aside thy besom; do not sweep Greece away!" Ah! Hush, hush! I think I hear his voice!

TRYGAEUS (*from within*)

Oh! Zeus, what art thou going to do for our people? Dost thou not see this, that our cities will soon be but empty husks?

SECOND SERVANT

As I told you, that is his form of madness. There you have a sample of his follies. When his trouble first began to seize him, he said to himself, "By what means could I go straight to Zeus?" Then he made himself very slender little ladders and so clambered up towards heaven; but he soon came hurtling down again and broke his head. Yesterday, to our misfortune, he went out and brought us back this thoroughbred, but from where I know not, this great beetle, whose groom he has forced me to become. He himself caresses it as though it were a horse, saying, "Oh! my little Pegasus, my noble aerial steed, may your wings soon bear me straight to Zeus!" But what is my master doing? I must stoop down to look through this hole. Oh! great gods! Here! neighbours, run here quick! here is my master flying off mounted on his beetle as if on horseback.

(*The Machine brings in* TRYGAEUS *astride an enormous figure of a dung-beetle with wings spread.*)

TRYGAEUS (*intoning*)

Gently, gently, go easy, beetle; don't start off so proudly, or trust at first too greatly to your powers; wait till you have sweated, till the beating of your wings shall make your limb joints supple. Above all things, don't let off some foul smell. I adjure you; else I would rather have you stay right in the stable.

SECOND SERVANT (*intoning*)

Poor master! Is he crazy?

TRYGAEUS (*intoning*)

Silence! silence!

SECOND SERVANT (*intoning*)

But why start up into the air on chance?

TRYGAEUS (*intoning*)

'Tis for the weal of all the Greeks; I am attempting a daring and novel feat.

SECOND SERVANT (*intoning*)

But what is your purpose? What useless folly!

TRYGAEUS (*intoning*)

No words of ill omen! Give vent to joy and command all men to keep silence, to close down their drains and privies with new tiles and to cork up their own arses.

FIRST SERVANT (*speaking*)

No, I shall not be silent, unless you tell me where you are going.

TRYGAEUS

Why, where am I likely to be going across the sky, if it be not to visit Zeus?

FIRST SERVANT

For what purpose?

TRYGAEUS

I want to ask him what he reckons to do for all the Greeks.

SECOND SERVANT

And if he doesn't tell you?

TRYGAEUS

I shall pursue him at law as a traitor who sells Greece to the Medes.

SECOND SERVANT

Death seize me, if I let you go.

TRYGAEUS

It is absolutely necessary.

SECOND SERVANT (*loudly*)

Alas! alas! dear little girls, your father is deserting you secretly to go to heaven. Ah! poor orphans, entreat him, beseech him.

(*The little daughters of* TRYGAEUS *come out.*)

LITTLE DAUGHTER (*singing*)

Father! father! what is this I hear? Is it true? What! you would leave me, you would vanish into the sky, you would go to the crows? [2] Impossible! Answer, father, if you love me.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Yes, I am going. You hurt me too sorely, my daughters, when you ask me for bread, calling me your daddy, and there is not the ghost

of an obolus in the house; if I succeed and come back, you will have a barley loaf every morning—and a punch in the eye for sauce!

LITTLE DAUGHTER

But how will you make the journey? There's no ship that will take you there.

TRYGAEUS

No, but this winged steed will.

LITTLE DAUGHTER

But what an idea, papa, to harness a beetle, to fly to the gods on.

TRYGAEUS

We see from Aesop's fables that they alone can fly to the abode of the Immortals.[3]

LITTLE DAUGHTER

Father, father, that's a tale nobody can believe! that such a smelly creature can have gone to the gods.

TRYGAEUS

It went to have vengeance on the eagle and break its eggs.

LITTLE DAUGHTER

Why not saddle Pegasus? you would have a more tragic appearance in the eyes of the gods.

TRYGAEUS

Eh! don't you see, little fool, that then twice the food would be wanted? Whereas my beetle devours again as filth what I have eaten myself.

LITTLE DAUGHTER

And if it fell into the watery depths of the sea, could it escape with its wings?

TRYGAEUS (*exposing himself*)

I am fitted with a rudder in case of need, and my Naxos beetle will serve me as a boat.

LITTLE DAUGHTER

And what harbour will you put in at?

TRYGAEUS

Why, is there not the harbour of Cantharus at the Piraeus?

LITTLE DAUGHTER

Take care not to knock against anything and so fall off into space; once a cripple, you would be a fit subject for Euripides, who would put you into a tragedy.[4]

TRYGAEUS (*as the Machine hoists him higher*)

I'll see to it. Good-bye! (*To the Athenians*) You, for love of whom I brave these dangers, do ye neither fart nor crap for the space of three days, for, if, while cleaving the air, my steed should scent anything, he would fling me head foremost from the summit of my hopes.

(*Intoning*)

Now come, my Pegasus, get a-going with up-pricked ears and make your golden bridle resound gaily. Eh! what are you doing? What are you up to? Do you turn your nose towards the cesspools? Come, pluck up a spirit; rush upwards from the earth, stretch out your speedy wings and make straight for the palace of Zeus; for once give up foraging in your daily food.—Hi! you down there, what are you after now? Oh! my god! it's a man taking a crap in the Piraeus, close to the whorehouses. But is it my death you seek then, my death? Will you not bury that right away and pile a great heap of earth upon it and plant wild thyme therein and pour perfumes on it? If I were to fall from up here and misfortune happened to me, the town of Chios would owe a fine of five talents for my death, all because of your damned arse.

(*Speaking*)

Alas! how frightened I am! oh! I have no heart for jests. Ah! machinist, take great care of me. There is already a wind whirling round my navel; take great care or, from sheer fright, I shall form food for my beetle. . . . But I think I am no longer far from the gods; aye, that is the dwelling of Zeus, I perceive. (*The beetle descends and comes to a halt in front of the house of* ZEUS. TRYGAEUS *dismounts and knocks at the door.*) Hullo! Hi! where is the doorkeeper? Will no one open?

HERMES (*from within*)

I think I can sniff a man. (*Opening the door*) Why, what plague is this?

TRYGAEUS

A horse-beetle.

HERMES

Oh! impudent, shameless rascal! oh! scoundrel! triple scoundrel! the greatest scoundrel in the world! how did you come here? Oh! scoundrel of all scoundrels! your name? Reply.

TRYGAEUS

Triple scoundrel.

HERMES

Your country?

TRYGAEUS

Triple scoundrel.

HERMES

Your father?

TRYGAEUS

My father? Triple scoundrel.

HERMES

By the Earth, you shall die, unless you tell me your name.

TRYGAEUS

I am Trygaeus of the Athmonian deme, a good vine-dresser, little addicted to quibbling and not at all an informer.

HERMES

Why do you come?

TRYGAEUS

I come to bring you this meat.

HERMES (*changing his tone*)

Ah! my good friend, did you have a good journey?

TRYGAEUS

Glutton, be off! I no longer seem a triple scoundrel to you. Come, call Zeus.

HERMES

Ah! ah! you are a long way yet from reaching the gods, for they moved yesterday.

TRYGAEUS

To what part of the earth?

HERMES

Eh! of the earth, did you say?

TRYGAEUS

In short, where are they then?

HERMES

Very far, very far, right at the furthest end of the dome of heaven.

TRYGAEUS

But why have they left you all alone here?

HERMES

I am watching what remains of the furniture, the little pots and pans, the bits of chairs and tables, and odd wine-jars.

TRYGAEUS

And why have the gods moved away?

HERMES

Because of their wrath against the Greeks. They have located War in the house they occupied themselves and have given him full power to do with you exactly as he pleases; then they went as high up as ever they could, so as to see no more of your fights and to hear no more of your prayers.

TRYGAEUS

What reason have they for treating us so?

HERMES

Because they have afforded you an opportunity for peace more than once, but you have always preferred war. If the Laconians got the very slightest advantage, they would exclaim, "By the Twin Brethren! the Athenians shall smart for this." If, on the contrary, the latter triumphed and the Laconians came with peace proposals, you would say, "By Demeter, they want to deceive us. No, by Zeus, we will not hear a word; they will always be coming as long as we hold Pylos."

TRYGAEUS

Yes, that is quite the style our folk do talk in.

HERMES

So that I don't know whether you will ever see Peace again.

TRYGAEUS

Why, where has she gone to then?

HERMES

War has cast her into a deep pit.

TRYGAEUS

Where?

HERMES

Down there, at the very bottom. And you see what heaps of stones he has piled over the top, so that you should never pull her out again.

TRYGAEUS

Tell me, what is War preparing against us?

HERMES

All I know is that last evening he brought along a huge mortar.

TRYGAEUS

And what is he going to do with his mortar?

HERMES

He wants to pound up all the cities of Greece in it. . . . But I must say good-bye, for I think he is coming out; what an uproar he is making!

(*He departs in haste.*)

TRYGAEUS

Ah! great gods let us seek safety; I think I already hear the noise of this fearful war mortar. (*He hides.*)

WAR (*enters, carrying a huge mortar*)

Oh! mortals, mortals, wretched mortals, how your jaws will snap!

TRYGAEUS

Oh! divine Apollo! what a prodigious big mortar! Oh, what misery the very sight of War causes me! This then is the foe from whom I fly, who is so cruel, so formidable, so stalwart, so solid on his legs!

WAR

Oh! Prasiae! thrice wretched, five times, aye, a thousand times wretched! for thou shalt be destroyed this day.

(*He throws some leeks into the mortar.*)

TRYGAEUS (*to the audience*)

This, gentlemen, does not concern *us* over much; it's only so much the worse for the Laconians.

WAR

Oh! Megara! Megara! how utterly are you going to be ground up! what fine mincemeat are you to be made into!

(*He throws in some garlic.*)

TRYGAEUS (*aside*)

Alas! alas! what bitter tears there will be among the Megarians!

WAR (*throwing in some cheese*)

Oh, Sicily! you too must perish! Your wretched towns shall be grated like this cheese. Now let us pour some Attic honey into the mortar.

(*He does so.*)

TRYGAEUS (*aside*)

Oh! I beseech you! use some other honey; this kind is worth four obols; be careful, oh! be careful of our Attic honey.

WAR

Hi! Tumult, you slave there!

TUMULT

What do you want?

WAR

Out upon you! Standing there with folded arms! Take this cuff on the head for your pains.

TUMULT

Oh! how it stings! Master, have you got garlic in your fist, I wonder?

WAR

Run and fetch me a pestle.

TUMULT

But we haven't got one; it was only yesterday we moved.

WAR

Go and fetch me one from Athens, and hurry, hurry!

TUMULT

I'll hurry; if I return without one, I shall have no cause for laughing.

(*He runs off.*)

TRYGAEUS (*to the audience*)

Ah! what is to become of us, wretched mortals that we are? See the danger that threatens if he returns with the pestle, for War will quietly amuse himself with pounding all the towns of Hellas to pieces. Ah! Bacchus! cause this herald of evil to perish on his road!

WAR (*to the returning* TUMULT)

Well?

TUMULT

Well, what?

WAR

You have brought back nothing?

TUMULT

Alas! the Athenians have lost their pestle—the tanner, who ground Greece to powder.

TRYGAEUS

Oh! Athené, venerable mistress! it is well for our city he is dead, and before he could serve us with *this* hash.

WAR

Then go and seek one at Sparta and have done with it!

TUMULT

Aye, aye, master!

(*He runs off*)

WAR (*shouting after him*)

Be back as quick as ever you can.

TRYGAEUS (*to the audience*)

What is going to happen, friends? This is the critical hour. Ah! if there is some initiate of Samothrace among you, this is surely the moment to wish this messenger some accident—some sprain or strain.

TUMULT (*returning*)

Alas! alas! thrice again, alas!

WAR

What is it? Again you come back without it?

TUMULT

The Spartans too have lost their pestle.

WAR

How, varlet?

TUMULT

They had lent it to their allies in Thrace, who have lost it for them.

TRYGAEUS

Long life to you, Thracians! My hopes revive, pluck up courage, mortals!

WAR

Take all this stuff; I am going in to make a pestle for myself.

(*He goes in, followed by* TUMULT.)

TRYGAEUS (*coming out of his hiding-place*)

Now is the time to sing as Datis did, as he masturbated at high noon, "Oh pleasure! oh enjoyment! oh delights!" Now, oh Greeks! is the moment when freed of quarrels and fighting, we should rescue sweet Peace and draw her out of this pit, before some other pestle prevents us. Come, labourers, merchants, workmen, artisans, strangers, whether you be domiciled or not, islanders, come here, Greeks of all countries, come hurrying here with picks and levers and ropes! This is the moment to drain a cup in honour of the Good Genius.

(*The* CHORUS *enters; it consists of labourers and farmers from various Greek states.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come hither all! quick, quick, hasten to the rescue! All peoples of Greece, now is the time or never, for you to help each other. You see yourselves freed from battles and all their horrors of bloodshed. The day hateful to Lamachus has come. (*To* TRYGAEUS) Come then, what must be done? Give your orders, direct us, for I swear to work this day without ceasing, until with the help of our levers and our engines we have drawn back into light the greatest of all goddesses, her to whom the olive is so dear.

TRYGAEUS

Silence! if War should hear your shouts of joy he would bound forth from his retreat in fury.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Such a decree overwhelms us with joy; how different to the edict, which bade us muster with provisions for three days.

TRYGAEUS

Let us beware lest the cursed Cerberus prevent us even from the nethermost hell from delivering the goddess by his furious howling, just as he did when on earth.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Once we have hold of her, none in the world will be able to take her from us. Huzza! huzza!

TRYGAEUS

You will work my death if you don't subdue your shouts. War will come running out and trample everything beneath his feet.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Well then! *Let* him confound, let him trample, let him overturn everything! We cannot help giving vent to our joy.

TRYGAEUS

Oh! cruel fate! My friends! in the name of the gods, what possesses you? Your dancing will wreck the success of a fine undertaking.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It's not I who want to dance; it's my legs that bound with delight.

TRYGAEUS

Enough, please, cease your gambols.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There! That's all.

TRYGAEUS

You say so, and nevertheless you go on.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yet one more figure and it's done.

TRYGAEUS

Well, just this one; then you must dance no more.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No, no more dancing, if we can help you.

TRYGAEUS

But look, you are not stopping even now.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

By Zeus, I am only throwing up my right leg, that's all.

TRYGAEUS

Come, I grant you that, but pray, annoy me no further.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah! the left leg too will have its fling; well, that's its right. I am so happy, so delighted at not having to carry my buckler any more. I fart for joy and I laugh more than if I had cast my old age, as a serpent does its skin.

TRYGAEUS

No, it's not time for joy yet, for you are not sure of success. But when you have got the goddess, then rejoice, shout and laugh; thenceforward you will be able to sail or stay at home, to make love or sleep, to attend festivals and processions, to play at cottabos, live like true Sybarites and to shout, Io, io!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ah! God grant we may see the blessed day. I have suffered so much; have so oft slept with Phormio on hard beds. You will no longer find me a bitter and angry judge . . .

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Nor, naturally, hard in your ways, as heretofore.

CHORUS (*singing*)

. . . but turned indulgent and grown younger by twenty years through happiness. We have been killing ourselves long enough, tiring ourselves out with going to the Lyceum and returning laden with spear and buckler.—But what can we do to please you? Come, speak; for 'tis a good Fate that has named you our leader.

TRYGAEUS

How shall we set about removing these stones?

HERMES (*who has just returned*)

Rash reprobate, what do you propose doing?

TRYGAEUS

Nothing bad, as Cillicon said.

HERMES

You are undone, you wretch.

TRYGAEUS

Yes, if the lot had to decide my life, for Hermes would know how to turn the chance.

HERMES

You are lost, you are dead.

TRYGAEUS

On what day?

HERMES

This instant.

TRYGAEUS

But I have not provided myself with flour and cheese yet [6] to start for death.

HERMES

You *are* kneaded and ground already, I tell you.

TRYGAEUS

Hah! I have not yet tasted that gentle pleasure.

HERMES

Don't you know that Zeus has decreed death for him who is caught exhuming Peace?

TRYGAEUS

What! must I really and truly die?

HERMES

You must.

TRYGAEUS

Well then, lend me three drachmae to buy a young pig; I wish to have myself initiated before I die.[7]

HERMES

Oh! Zeus, the Thunderer!

TRYGAEUS

I adjure you in the name of the gods, master, don't report us!

HERMES

I may not, I cannot keep silent.

TRYGAEUS

In the name of the meats which I brought you so good-naturedly.

HERMES

Why, wretched man, Zeus will annihilate me, if I do not shout out at the top of my voice, to inform him what you are plotting.

TRYGAEUS

Oh, no! don't shout, I beg you, dear little Hermes. . . . And what are you doing, comrades? You stand there as though you were stocks and stones. Wretched men, speak, entreat him at once; otherwise he will be shouting.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! mighty Hermes! do not do it; no, do not do it! If ever you have eaten some young pig, sacrificed by us on your altars, with pleasure, may this offering not be without value in your sight to-day.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Do you not hear them wheedling you, mighty god?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Be not pitiless toward our prayers; permit us to deliver the goddess. Oh! the most human, the most generous of the gods, be favourable toward is, if it be true that you detest the haughty crests and proud brows of Pisander; we shall never cease, oh master, offering you sacred victims and solemn prayers.

TRYGAEUS

Have mercy, mercy, let yourself be touched by their words; never was your worship so dear to them as to-day. (*Aside*) Really they are the greatest thieves that ever were. (*To* HERMES) And I shall reveal to you a great and terrible plot that is being hatched against the gods.

HERMES

Hah! speak and perchance I shall let myself be softened.

TRYGAEUS

Know then, that the Moon and that infamous Sun are plotting against you, and want to deliver Greece into the hands of the barbarians.

HERMES

What for?

TRYGAEUS

Because it is to you that we sacrifice, whereas the barbarians worship them; hence they would like to see you destroyed, that they alone might receive the offerings.

HERMES

Is it then for this reason that these untrustworthy charioteers have for so long been defrauding us, one of them robbing us of daylight and the other nibbling away at the other's disk?

TRYGAEUS

Yes, certainly. So therefore, Hermes, my friend, help us with your whole heart to find and deliver the captive and we will celebrate the great Panathenaea in your honour as well as all the festivals of the other gods; for Hermes shall be the Mysteries, the Dipolia, the Adonia; everywhere

the towns, freed from their miseries, will sacrifice to Hermes the Liberator; you will be loaded with benefits of every kind, and to start with, I offer you this cup for libations as your first present.

HERMES

Ah! how golden cups do influence me! Come, friends, get to work. To the pit quickly, pick in hand, and drag away the stones.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We go, but you, cleverest of all the gods, supervise our labours; tell us, good workman as you are, what we must do; we shall obey your orders with alacrity.

(*They begin to lift the stones.*)

TRYGAEUS

Quick, reach me your cup, and let us preface our work by addressing prayers to the gods.

HERMES

Libation! Libation! Silence! Silence! Let us offer our libations and our prayers, so that this day may begin an era of unalloyed happiness for Greece and that he who has bravely pulled at the rope with us may never resume his buckler.

TRYGAEUS

Aye, may we pass our lives in peace, caressing our mistresses and poking the fire.

HERMES

May he who would prefer the war, oh Dionysus . . .

TRYGAEUS

Be ever drawing barbed arrows out of his elbows.

HERMES

If there be a citizen, greedy for military rank and honours, who refuses, oh, divine Peace! to restore you to daylight . . .

TRYGAEUS

May he behave as cowardly as Cleonymus on the battlefield.

HERMES

If a lance-maker or a dealer in shields desires war for the sake of better trade . . .

TRYGAEUS

May he be taken by pirates and eat nothing but barley.

HERMES

If some ambitious man does not help us, because he wants to become a General, or if a slave is plotting to pass over to the enemy . . .

TRYGAEUS

Let his limbs be broken on the wheel, may he be beaten to death with rods!

HERMES

As for us, may Fortune favour us! Io! Paean, Io!

TRYGAEUS

Don't say Paean, but simply, Io.

HERMES

Very well, then! Io! Io! I'll simply say, Io!

TRYGAEUS

To Hermes, the Graces, the Horae, Aphrodité, Eros!

HERMES

But not to Ares.

TRYGAEUS

No.

HERMES

Nor to Enyalius.

TRYGAEUS

No.

(*The stones have been removed and a rope attached to the cover of the pit. The indented portions of the following scene are a sort of chanty.*)

HERMES

Come, all strain at the ropes to tear off the cover. Pull!

CHORUS

Heave away, heave, heave, oh!

HERMES

Come, pull harder, harder.

CHORUS

Heave away, heave, heave, oh!

HERMES

Still harder, harder still.

CHORUS

Heave away, heave! Heave away, heave, heave, oh!

TRYGAEUS

Come, come, there is no working together. Come! all pull at the same instant! you Boeotians are only pretending. Beware!

HERMES

Come, heave away, heave!

TRYGAEUS

Heave away, heave oh!

CHORUS

Hi! you two pull as well.

TRYGAEUS

Why, I am pulling, I am hanging on to the rope and straining till I am almost off my feet; I am working with all my might.

CHORUS

Why does not the work advance then?

TRYGAEUS

Lamachus, this is terrible! You are in the way, sitting there. We have no use for your Medusa's head, friend. But wait, the Argives have not pulled the least bit; they have done nothing but laugh at us for our pains while they were getting gain with both hands.

HERMES

Ah! my dear sir, the Laconians at all events pull with vigour.

TRYGAEUS

But look! only those among them who generally hold the plough-tail show any zeal, while the armourers impede them in their efforts.

HERMES

And the Megarians too are doing nothing, yet look how they are pulling and showing their teeth like famished curs.

TRYGAEUS

The poor wretches are dying of hunger I suppose.

HERMES

This won't do, friends. Come! all together! Everyone to the work and with a good heart for the business.

CHORUS

Heave away, heave!

HERMES

Harder!

CHORUS

Heave away, heave!

HERMES

Come on then, by heaven.

CHORUS

We are moving it a little.

TRYGAEUS

Isn't it terrible and stupid! some pull one way and others another. You Argives there, beware of a thrashing!

HERMES

Come, put your strength into it.

TRYGAEUS

Heave away, heave!

CHORUS

There are many ill-disposed folk among us.

TRYGAEUS

Do you at least, who long for peace, pull heartily.

CHORUS

But there are some who prevent us.

HERMES

Off to the Devil with you, Megarians! The goddess hates you. She recollects that you were the first to rub her the wrong way. Athenians, you are not well placed for pulling. There you are too busy with law-suits; if you really want to free the goddess, get down a little towards the sea.[8]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, friends, none but husbandmen on the rope.

HERMES

Ah! that will do ever so much better.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

He says the thing is going well. Come, all of you, together and with a will.

TRYGAEUS

It's the husbandmen who are doing all the work.

CHORUS

Come then, come, and all together!

HERMES

Hah! hah! at last there is some unanimity in the work.

CHORUS

Don't let us give up, let us redouble our efforts.

HERMES

There! now we have it!

CHORUS

Come then, all together! Heave away, heave! Heave away, heave! Heave away, heave! Heave away, heave! Heave away, heave! All together!

(PEACE *is drawn out of the pit. With her come* OPORA *and* THEORIA.)

TRYGAEUS

Oh! venerated goddess, who givest us our grapes, where am I to find the ten-thousand-gallon words wherewith to greet thee? I have none such at home. Oh! hail to thee, Opora, and thee, Theoria! How beautiful is thy face! How sweet thy breath! What gentle fragrance comes from thy bosom, gentle as freedom from military duty, as the most dainty perfumes!

HERMES

Is it then a smell like a soldier's knapsack?

TRYGAEUS

Oh! hateful soldier! your hideous satchel makes me sick! it stinks like the belching of onions, whereas this lovable deity has the odour of sweet fruits, of festivals, of the Dionysia, of the harmony of flutes, of the tragic poets, of the verses of Sophocles, of the phrases of Euripides . . .

HERMES

That's a foul calumny, you wretch! She detests that framer of subtleties and quibbles.

TRYGAEUS (*ignoring this*)

. . . of ivy, of straining-bags for wine, of bleating ewes, of provision-laden women hastening to the kitchen, of the tipsy servant wench, of the upturned wine-jar, and of a whole heap of other good things.

HERMES

Then look how the reconciled towns chat pleasantly together, how they laugh . . .

TRYGAEUS

And yet they are all cruelly mishandled; their wounds are bleeding still.

HERMES

But let us also scan the mien of the spectators; we shall thus find out the trade of each.

TRYGAEUS

Good god!

HERMES

Look at that poor crest-maker, tearing at his hair . . .

TRYGAEUS

. . . and at that pike-maker, who has just farted in yon sword-cutler's face.

HERMES

And do you see with what pleasure this sickle-maker . . .

TRYGAEUS

. . . is thumbing his nose at the spear-maker?

HERMES

Now tell the husbandmen to be off.

TRYGAEUS

Listen, good folk! Let the husbandmen take their farming tools and return to their fields as quickly as possible, but without either sword, spear or javelin. All is as quiet as if Peace had been reigning for a century. Come, let everyone go and till the earth, singing the Paean.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to* PEACE)

Oh, thou, whom men of standing desired and who art good to husbandmen, I have gazed upon thee with delight; and now I go to greet my vines, to caress after so long an absence the fig trees I planted in my youth.

TRYGAEUS

Friends, let us first adore the goddess, who has delivered us from crests and Gorgons; then let us hurry to our farms, having first bought a nice little piece of salt fish to eat in the fields.

HERMES

By Posidon! what a fine crew they make and dense as the crust of a cake; they are as nimble as guests on their way to a feast.

TRYGAEUS

See, how their iron spades glitter and how beautifully their three-pronged mattocks glisten in the sun! How regularly they align the plants! I also burn to go into the country and to turn over the earth I have so long neglected.—Friends, do you remember the happy life that Peace afforded us formerly; can you recall the splendid baskets of figs, both fresh and dried, the myrtles, the sweet wine, the violets blooming near the spring, and the olives, for which we have wept so much? Worship, adore the goddess for restoring you so many blessings.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Hail! hail! thou beloved divinity! thy return overwhelms us with joy. When far from thee, my ardent wish to see my fields again made me pine with regret. From thee came all blessings. Oh! much desired Peace! thou art the sole support of those who spend their lives tilling the earth. Under thy rule we had a thousand delicious enjoyments at our beck; thou wert the husbandman's wheaten cake and his safeguard. So that our vineyards, our young fig-tree woods and all our plantations hail thee with delight and smile at thy coming.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But where was she then, I wonder, all the long time she spent away from us? Hermes, thou benevolent god, tell us!

HERMES

Wise husbandmen, hearken to my words, if you want to know why she was lost to you. The start of our misfortunes was the exile of Phidias; Pericles feared he might share his ill-luck, he mistrusted your peevish nature and, to prevent all danger to himself, he threw out that little spark, the Megarian decree, set the city aflame, and blew up the conflagration with a hurricane of war, so that the smoke drew tears from all Greeks both here and over there. At the very outset of this fire our vines were a-crackle, our casks knocked together; it was beyond the power of any man to stop the disaster, and Peace disappeared.

TRYGAEUS

That, by Apollo! is what no one ever told me; I could not think what connection there could be between Phidias and Peace.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nor I, until now. This accounts for her beauty, if she is related to him. There are so many things that escape us.

HERMES

Then, when the towns subject to you saw that you were angered one against the other and were showing each other your teeth like dogs, they hatched a thousand plots to pay you no more dues and gained over the chief citizens of Sparta at the price of gold. They, being as shamelessly greedy as they were faithless in diplomacy, chased off Peace with ignominy to let loose War. Though this was profitable to *them*, it was the ruin of the husbandmen, who were innocent of all blame; for, in revenge, your galleys went out to devour their figs.

TRYGAEUS

And with justice too; did they not break down my black fig tree, which I had planted and dunged with my own hands?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yes, by Zeus! yes, that was well done; the wretches broke a chest for me with stones, which held six medimni of corn.

HERMES

Then the rural labourers flocked into the city [9] and let themselves be bought over like the others. Not having even a grape-stone to munch and longing after their figs, they looked towards the demagogues. These well knew that the poor were driven to extremity and lacked even bread; but they nevertheless drove away the Goddess, each time she reappeared in answer to the wish of the country, with their loud shrieks that were as sharp as pitchforks; furthermore, they attacked the well-filled purses of the richest among our allies on the pretence that they belonged to Brasidas' party. And then you would tear the poor accused wretch to pieces with your teeth; for the city, all pale with hunger and cowed with terror, gladly snapped up any calumny that was thrown it to devour. So the strangers, seeing what terrible blows the informers dealt, sealed their lips with gold. They grew rich, while you, alas! you could only see that Greece was going to ruin. It was the tanner who was the author of all this woe.

TRYGAEUS

Enough said, Hermes leave that man in Hades, whither he has gone; he no longer belongs to us, but rather to you. That he was a cheat, a

braggart, a calumniator when alive, why, nothing could be truer; but anything you might say now would be an insult to one of your own folk.[10] (*To* PEACE) Oh! venerated Goddess! why art thou silent?

HERMES

And how could she speak to the spectators? She is too angry at all that they have made her suffer.

TRYGAEUS

At least let her speak a little to you, Hermes.

HERMES

Tell me, my dear, what are your feelings with regard to them? Come, you relentless foe of all bucklers, speak; I am listening to you. (PEACE *whispers into* HERMES' *ear.*) Is that your grievance against them? Yes, yes, I understand. Hearken, you folk, this is her complaint. She says, that after the affair of Pylos she came to you unbidden to bring you a basket full of truces and that you thrice repulsed her by your votes in the assembly.

TRYGAEUS

Yes, we did wrong, but forgive us, for our mind was then entirely absorbed in leather.

HERMES

Listen again to what she has just asked me. Who was her greatest foe here? and furthermore, had she a friend who exerted himself to put an end to the fighting?

TRYGAEUS

Her most devoted friend was Cleonymus; it is undisputed.

HERMES

How then did Cleonymus behave in fights?

TRYGAEUS

Oh! the bravest of warriors! Only he was not born of the father he claims; he showed it quick enough in the army by throwing away his weapons.

HERMES

There is yet another question she has just put to me. Who rules now in the rostrum?

TRYGAEUS

It's Hyperbolus who now holds empire on the Pnyx. (*To* PEACE) What now? you turn away your head!

HERMES

She is vexed, that the people should give themselves a wretch of that kind for their chief.

TRYGAEUS

Oh! we shall not employ him again; but the people, seeing themselves without a leader, took him haphazard, just as a man, who is naked, springs upon the first cloak he sees.

HERMES

She asks, what will be the result of such a choice by the city?

TRYGAEUS

We shall be more far-seeing in consequence.

HERMES

And why?

TRYGAEUS

Because he is a lamp-maker. Formerly we only directed our business by groping in the dark; now we shall only deliberate by lamplight.

HERMES

Oh! oh! what questions she does order me to put to you!

TRYGAEUS

What are they?

HERMES

She wants to have news of a whole heap of old-fashioned things she left here. First of all, how is Sophocles?

TRYGAEUS

Very well, but something very strange has happened to him.

HERMES

What then?

TRYGAEUS

He has turned from Sophocles into Simonides.

HERMES

Into Simonides? How so?

TRYGAEUS

Because, though old and broken-down as he is, he would put to sea on a hurdle to gain an obolus.

HERMES

And wise Cratinus, is he still alive?

TRYGAEUS

He died about the time of the Laconian invasion.

HERMES

How?

TRYGAEUS

Of a swoon. He could not bear the shock of seeing one of his casks full of wine broken. Ah! what a number of other misfortunes our city has suffered! So, dearest mistress, nothing can now separate us from thee.

HERMES

If that be so, receive Opora here for a wife; take her to the country, live with her, and grow fine grapes together.

TRYGAEUS (*to* OPORA)

Come, my dear one, come and accept my kisses. (*To* HERMES) Tell me, Hermes, my master, do you think it would hurt me to love her a little, after so long an abstinence?

HERMES

No, not if you swallow a potion of penny-royal afterwards.[11] But hasten to lead Theoria to the Senate; that was where she lodged before.

TRYGAEUS

Oh! fortunate Senate! Thanks to Theoria, what soups you will swallow for the space of three days! how you will devour meats and cooked tripe! Come, farewell, friend Hermes!

HERMES

And to you also, my dear sir, may you have much happiness, and don't forget me.

TRYGAEUS (*looking around for his dung-beetle*)

Come, beetle, home, home, and let us fly on a swift wing.

HERMES

Oh! he is no longer here.

TRYGAEUS

Where has he gone to then?

HERMES

He is 'harnessed to the chariot of Zeus and bears the thunderbolts.'

TRYGAEUS

But where will the poor wretch get his food?

HERMES

He will eat Ganymede's ambrosia.

TRYGAEUS

Very well then, but how am I going to descend?

HERMES

Oh! never fear, there is nothing simpler; place yourself beside the goddess.

TRYGAEUS

Come, my pretty maidens, follow me quickly; there are plenty of men waiting for you with their tools ready.

(*He goes out, with* OPORA *and* THEORIA.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Farewell and good luck be yours! Let us begin by handing over all this gear to the care of our servants, for no place is less safe than a theatre; there is always a crowd of thieves prowling around it, seeking to find some mischief to do. Come, keep a good watch over all this. As for ourselves, let us explain to the spectators what we have in our minds, the purpose of our play.

(*The* CHORUS *turns and faces the audience.*)

Undoubtedly the comic poet who mounted the stage to praise himself in the parabasis would deserve to be handed over to the sticks of the beadles. Nevertheless, oh Muse, if it be right to esteem the most honest and illustrious of our comic writers at his proper value, permit our poet to say that he thinks he has deserved a glorious renown. First of all, he is the one who has compelled his rivals no longer to scoff at rags or to war with lice; and as for those Heracleses, always chewing and ever hungry, he was the first to cover them with ridicule and to chase them from the stage;[12] he has also dismissed that slave, whom one never failed to set weeping before you, so that his comrade might have the chance of jeering at his stripes and might ask, "Wretch, what has happened to your hide? Has the lash rained an army of its thongs on you and laid your back waste?" After having delivered us from all these wearisome ineptitudes

and these low buffooneries, he has built up for us a great art, like a palace with high towers, constructed of fine phrases, great thoughts and of jokes not common on the streets. Moreover it's not obscure private persons or women that he stages in his comedies; but, bold as Heracles, it's the very greatest whom he attacks, undeterred by the fetid stink of leather or the threats of hearts of mud. He has the right to say, "I am the first ever dared to go straight for that beast with the sharp teeth and the terrible eyes that flashed lambent fire like those of Cynna, surrounded by a hundred lewd flatterers, who spittle-licked him to his heart's content; it had a voice like a roaring torrent, the stench of a seal, the unwashed balls of a Lamia and the arse of a camel.[13] I did not recoil in horror at the sight of such a monster, but fought him relentlessly to win your deliverance and that of the islanders." Such are the services which should be graven in your recollection and entitle me to your thanks. Yet I have not been seen frequenting the wrestling school intoxicated with success and trying to seduce young boys; but I took all my theatrical gear and returned straight home. I pained folk but little and caused them much amusement; my conscience rebuked me for nothing. (*More and more rapidly from here on*) Hence both grown men and youths should be on my side and I likewise invite the bald to give me their votes; for, if I triumph, everyone will say, both at table and at festivals, "Carry this to the bald man, give these cakes to the bald one, do not grudge the poet whose talent shines as bright as his own bare skull the share he deserves."

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, Muse! drive the war far from our city and come to preside over our dances, if you love me; come and celebrate the nuptials of the gods, the banquets of us mortals and the festivals of the fortunate; these are the themes that inspire thy most poetic songs. And should Carcinus come to beg thee for admission with his sons to thy chorus, refuse all traffic with them; remember they are but gelded birds, stork-necked dancers, mannikins about as tall as a goat's turd, in fact machine-made poets. Contrary to all expectation, the father has at last managed to finish a piece, but he admits that a cat strangled it one fine evening.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Such are the songs with which the Muse with the glorious hair inspires the able poet and which enchant the assembled populace, when the spring swallow twitters beneath the foliage; but the god spare us from the chorus of Morsimus and that of Melanthius! Oh! what a bitter discordancy grated upon my ears that day when the tragic chorus was directed by this same Melanthius and his brother,

these two Gorgons, these two Harpies, the plague of the seas, whose gluttonous bellies devour the entire race of fishes, these followers of old women, these goats with their stinking arm-pits. Oh! Muse, spit upon them abundantly and keep the feast gaily with me.

(TRYGAEUS *enters, limping painfully, accompanied by* OPORA *and* THEORIA.)

TRYGAEUS

Ah! it's a rough job getting to the gods! my legs are as good as broken through it. (*To the audience*) How small you were, to be sure, when seen from heaven! you had all the appearance too of being great rascals; but seen close, you look even worse.

SERVANT (*coming out of* TRYGAEUS' *house*)

Is that you, master?

TRYGAEUS

So I've been told.

SERVANT

What has happened to you?

TRYGAEUS

My legs pain me; it was such a damned long journey.

SERVANT

Oh! tell me . . .

TRYGAEUS

What?

SERVANT

Did you see any other man besides yourself strolling about in heaven?

TRYGAEUS

No, only the souls of two or three dithyrambic poets.

SERVANT

What were they doing up there?

TRYGAEUS

They were seeking to catch some lyric exordia as they flew by immersed in the billows of the air.

SERVANT

Is it true, what they tell us, that men are turned into stars after death?

TRYGAEUS

Quite true.

SERVANT

Then what star has Ion of Chios turned into?

TRYGAEUS

The Morning Star, the one he wrote a poem about; as soon as he got up there, everyone called him the Morning Star.

SERVANT

And those stars like sparks, that plough up the air as they dart across the sky.

TRYGAEUS

They are the rich leaving the feast with a lantern and a light inside it.—But hurry up, show this young girl into my house, (*pointing to* OPORA) clean out the bath, heat some water and prepare the nuptial couch for herself and me. When that's done, come back here; meanwhile I am off to present this other one to the Senate.

SERVANT

But where then did you get these girls?

TRYGAEUS

Where? why in heaven.

SERVANT

I would not give more than an obolus for gods who have got to keeping brothels like us mere mortals.

TRYGAEUS

They are not all like that, but there are some up there too who live by this trade.

SERVANT

Come, that's rich! But tell me, shall I give her something to eat?

TRYGAEUS

No, for she would touch neither bread nor cake; she is used to licking ambrosia at the table of the gods.

SERVANT

Well, we can give her something to lick down here too.

(*He takes* OPORA *into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Here is a truly happy old man, as far as I can judge.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Ah! but what shall I be, when you see me presently dressed for the wedding?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Made young again by love and scented with perfumes, your lot will be one we all shall envy.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

And when I lie beside her and fondle her breasts?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! then you will be happier than those spinning-tops who call Carcinus their father.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

And I well deserve it; have I not bestridden a beetle to save the Greeks, who now, thanks to me, can make love at their ease and sleep peacefully on their farms?

SERVANT (*returning from the house*)

The girl has quitted the bath; she is charming from head to foot, belly and buttocks too; the cake is baked and they are kneading the sesamé-biscuit; nothing is lacking but the bridegroom's tool.

TRYGAEUS

Let us first hasten to lodge Theoria in the hands of the Senate.

SERVANT

Tell me, who is this woman?

TRYGAEUS

Why, it's Theoria, with whom we used formerly to go to Brauron, to get tipsy and frolic. I had the greatest trouble to get hold of her.

SERVANT

Ah! you charmer! what pleasure your pretty bottom will afford me every four years!

TRYGAEUS (*to the audience*)

Let's see, which one of you is steady enough to be trusted by the Senate with the care of this charming wench? (*to the* SERVANT) Hi! you, friend! what are you drawing there?

SERVANT (*who has been making signs in the air*)

It's er . . . well, at the Isthmian Games I shall have a tent for my tool.

TRYGAEUS (*to the audience*)

Come, who wishes to take the charge of her? No one? Come, Theoria, I am going to lead you into the midst of the spectators and confide you to their care.

SERVANT

Ah! there is one who makes a sign to you.

TRYGAEUS

Who is it?

SERVANT

It's Ariphrades. He wishes to take her home at once.

TRYGAEUS

No, he must not. He would soon have her done for, absorbing all her life-force. Come, Theoria, take off all these clothes. (THEORIA *undresses. As soon as she is nude,* TRYGAEUS *conducts her to the front row of seats, where the* SENATORS *sit.*) Senate, Prytanes, gaze upon Theoria and see what precious blessings I place in your hands. Hasten to raise its limbs and to immolate the victim. And look at this chimney.

SERVANT

God, what a beautiful one! It's black with smoke because the Senate used to do its cooking there before the war.[14]

TRYGAEUS

Now that you have found Theoria again, you can start the most charming games from to-morrow, wrestling with her on the ground, on all fours, or you can lay her on her side, or stand before her with bent knees, or, well rubbed with oil, you can boldly enter the lists, as in the Pancratium, belabouring your foe with blows from your fist or something else. The next day you will celebrate equestrian games, in which the riders will ride side by side, or else the chariot teams, thrown one on top of another, panting and whinnying, will roll and knock against each other on the ground, while other rivals, thrown out of their seats, will fall before reaching the goal, utterly exhausted by their efforts.—Come, Prytanes, take Theoria. Oh! look how graciously yonder fellow has received her; you would not have been in such a hurry to introduce her to the Senate, if nothing were coming to you through it;[15] you would not have failed to plead some holiday as an excuse.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Such a man as you assures the happiness of all his fellow-citizens.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

When you are gathering your vintages you will prize me even better.

CHORUS (*singing*)

E'en from to-day we hail you as the deliverer of mankind.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Wait until you have drunk a beaker of new wine, before you appraise my true merits.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Excepting the gods, there is none greater than yourself, and that will ever be our opinion.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

Yea, Trygaeus of Athmonia has deserved well of you, he has freed both husbandman and craftsman from the most cruel ills; he has vanquished Hyberbolus.

SERVANT

Well then, what must be done now?

TRYGAEUS

You must offer pots of green-stuff to the goddess to consecrate her altars.

SERVANT

Pots of green-stuff as we do to poor Hermes—and even he thinks the fare pretty mean?

TRYGAEUS

What will you offer then? A fatted bull?

SERVANT

Oh no! I don't want to start bellowing the battle-cry.[16]

TRYGAEUS

A great fat swine then?

SERVANT

No, no.

TRYGAEUS

Why not?

SERVANT

We don't want any of the swinishness of Theagenes.

TRYGAEUS

What other victim do your prefer then?

SERVANT

A sheep.

TRYGAEUS

A sheep?

SERVANT

Yes.

TRYGAEUS

But that's the Ionic form of the word.

SERVANT

Purposely. So that if anyone in the assembly says, "We must go to war,' all may start bleating in alarm, "Oï, oï."

TRYGAEUS

A brilliant idea.

SERVANT

And we shall all be lambs one toward the other, yes, and milder still toward the allies.

TRYGAEUS

Then go for the sheep and haste to bring it back with you; I will prepare the altar for the sacrifice.

(*They both leave.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

How everything succeeds to our wish, when the gods are willing and Fortune favours us! how opportunely everything falls out.

TRYGAEUS (*returning*)

Nothing could be truer, for look! here stands the altar all ready at my door.

(*He enters his house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Hurry, hurry, for the winds are fickle; make haste, while the divine will is set on stopping this cruel war and is showering on us the most striking benefits.

TRYGAEUS (*returning*)

Here is the basket of barley-seed mingled with salt, the chaplet and the sacred knife; and there is the fire; so we are only waiting for the sheep.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Hasten, hasten, for, if Chaeris sees you, he will come without bidding, he and his flute; and when you see him puffing and panting and out of breath, you will have to give him something.

TRYGAEUS (*to the* SERVANT *who has returned with a sheep and a vase of water*)

Come, seize the basket and take the lustral water and hurry to circle round the altar to the right.

SERVANT

There! that's done. What is your next bidding?

TRYGAEUS

Wait. I take this fire-brand first and plunge it into the water. Now quick, quick, you sprinkle the altar. Give me some barley-seed, purify yourself and hand me the basin; then scatter the rest of the barley among the audience.

SERVANT

Done.

TRYGAEUS

You have thrown it?

SERVANT

Yes, by Hermes! and all the spectators have had their share.

TRYGAEUS

At least the women got none.

SERVANT

Oh! their husbands will give them some this evening.

TRYGAEUS

Let us pray! Who is here? Are there any good men? [17]

SERVANT

Come, give me the water, so that I may sprinkle these people. Faith! they are indeed good, brave men.

(*He throws the lustral water on them.*)

TRYGAEUS

You believe so?

SERVANT

I am sure, and the proof of it is that we have flooded them with lustral water and they have not budged an inch.

TRYGAEUS

Let us pray, then, as soon as we can.

SERVANT

Yes, let us pray.

TRYGAEUS

Oh! Peace, mighty queen, venerated goddess, thou, who presidest over choruses and at nuptials, deign to accept the sacrifices we offer thee.

SERVANT

Receive it, greatly honoured mistress, and behave not like the courtesans, who half open the door to entice the gallants, draw back when they are stared at, to return once more if a man passes on. But do not thou act like this to us.

TRYGAEUS

No, but like an honest woman, show thyself to thy worshippers, who are worn with regretting thee all these thirteen years. Hush the noise of battle, be a true Lysimacha to us. Put an end to this tittle-tattle, to this idle babble, that set us defying one another. Cause the Greeks once more to taste the pleasant beverage of friendship and temper all hearts with the gentle feeling of forgiveness. Make excellent commodities flow to our markets, fine heads of garlic, early cucumbers, apples, pomegranates and nice little cloaks for the slaves; make them bring geese, ducks, pigeons and larks from Boeotia and baskets of eels from Lake Copais; we shall all rush to buy them, disputing their possession with Morychus, Teleas, Glaucetes and every other glutton. Melanthius will arrive on the market last of all; they'll say, "no more eels, all sold!" and then he'll start groaning and exclaiming as in his monologue of Medea, "I am dying, I am dying! Alas! I have let those hidden in the beet escape me!" And won't we laugh? These are the wishes, mighty goddess, which we pray thee to grant. (*To the* SERVANT) Take the knife and slaughter the sheep like a finished cook.

SERVANT

No, the goddess does not wish it.

TRYGAEUS

And why not?

SERVANT

Blood cannot please Peace, so let us spill none upon her altar.

TRYGAEUS

Then go and sacrifice the sheep in the house, cut off the legs and bring them here; thus the carcase will be saved for the Choregus.

(*The* SERVANT *goes into the house with the sheep.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

You, who remain here, get chopped wood and everything needed for the sacrifice ready.

TRYGAEUS

Don't I look like a diviner preparing his mystic fire?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Undoubtedly. Will anything that a wise man ought to know escape you? Don't you know all that a man should know, who is distinguished for his wisdom and inventive daring?

TRYGAEUS

There! the wood catches. Its smoke blinds poor Stilbides. I am now going to bring the table and thus be my own slave.

(*He goes into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

You have braved a thousand dangers to save your sacred town. All honour to you! your glory will be ever envied.

TRYGAEUS (*returning with a table*)

Wait. Here are the legs, place them upon the altar. For myself, I mean to go back to the entrails and the cakes.

(*He is about to go into the house.*)

SERVANT (*going in ahead of him*)

I'll take care of them.

TRYGAEUS

But I want you here.

SERVANT (*returning*)

Well then, here I am. Do you think I have taken long?

TRYGAEUS

Just get this roasted. Ah! who is this man, crowned with laurel, who is coming to me?

SERVANT

He has a self-important look; is he some diviner?

TRYGAEUS

No, it's Hierocles, that oracle-monger from Oreus.

SERVANT

What is he going to tell us?

TRYGAEUS

Evidently he is coming to oppose the peace.

SERVANT

No, it's the odour of the fat that attracts him.

TRYGAEUS

Let us appear not to see him.

SERVANT

Very well.

HIEROCLES (*approaching*)

What sacrifice is this? to what god are you offering it?

TRYGAEUS (*to the* SERVANT)

Keep quiet.—(*Aloud*) Look after the roasting and keep your hands off the meat.

HIEROCLES

To whom are you sacrificing? Answer me.

TRYGAEUS

Ah! the tail is showing favourable omens.[18]

SERVANT

Aye, very favourable, oh, loved and mighty Peace!

HIEROCLES

Come, cut off the first offering[19] and make the oblation.

TRYGAEUS

It's not roasted enough.

HIEROCLES

Yea, truly, it's done to a turn.

TRYGAEUS

Mind your own business, friend! (*To the* SERVANT) Cut away.

HIEROCLES

Where is the table?

TRYGAEUS

Bring the libations.

(*The* SERVANT *departs.*)

HIEROCLES

The tongue is cut separately.

TRYGAEUS

We know all that. But just listen to one piece of advice.

HIEROCLES

And that is?

TRYGAEUS

Don't talk, for it is divine Peace to whom we are sacrificing.

HIEROCLES (*in an oracular tone*)

Oh! wretched mortals, oh, you idiots!

TRYGAEUS

Keep such ugly terms for yourself.

HIEROCLES (*as before*)

What! you are so ignorant you don t understand the will of the gods and you make a treaty, you, who are men, with apes, who are full of malice?

TRYGAEUS

Ha, ha, ha!

HIEROCLES

What are you laughing at?

TRYGAEUS

Ha, ha! your apes amuse me!

HIEROCLES (*resuming the oracular manner*)

You simple pigeons, you trust yourselves to foxes, who are all craft, both in mind and heart.

TRYGAEUS

Oh, you trouble-maker! may your lungs get as hot as this meat!

HIEROCLES

Nay, nay! if only the Nymphs had not fooled Bacis, and Bacis mortal men; and if the Nymphs had not tricked Bacis a second time . . .

TRYGAEUS (*mocking his manner*)

May the plague seize you, if you don't stop Bacizing!

HIEROCLES

. . . it would not have been written in the book of Fate that the bonds of Peace must be broken; but first . . .

TRYGAEUS

The meat must be dusted with salt.

HIEROCLES

. . . it does not please the blessed gods that we should stop the War until the wolf uniteth with the sheep.

(*A kind of oracle-match now ensues.*)

TRYGAEUS

How, you cursed animal, could the wolf ever unite with the sheep?

HIEROCLES

As long as the wood-bug gives off a fetid odour, when it flies; as long as the noisy bitch is forced by nature to litter blind pups, so long shall peace be forbidden.

TRYGAEUS

Then what should be done? Not to stop War would be to leave it to the decision of chance which of the two people should suffer the most, whereas by uniting under a treaty, we share the empire of Greece.

HIEROCLES

You will never make the crab walk straight.

TRYGAEUS

You shall no longer be fed at the Prytaneum; when the war is over, oracles are not wanted.

HIEROCLES

You will never smooth the rough spikes of the hedgehog.

TRYGAEUS

Will you never stop fooling the Athenians?

HIEROCLES

What oracle ordered you to burn these joints of mutton in honour of the gods?

TRYGAEUS

This grand oracle of Homer's: "Thus vanished the dark war-clouds and we offered a sacrifice to new-born Peace. When the flame had consumed the thighs of the victim and its inwards had appeased our hunger, we poured out the libations of wine." 'Twas I who arranged the sacred rites, but none offered the shining cup to the diviner.[20]

HIEROCLES

I care little for that. 'Tis not the Sibyl who spoke it.

TRYGAEUS

Wise Homer has also said: "He who delights in the horrors of civil war has neither country nor laws nor home." What noble words!

HIEROCLES

Beware lest the kite turn your brain and rob . . .

TRYGAEUS (*to the* SERVANT *who has returned with the libations*)

Look out, slave! This oracle threatens our meat. Quick, pour the libation, and give me some of the inwards.

HIEROCLES

I too will help myself to a bit, if you like.

TRYGAEUS

The libation! the libation!

HIEROCLES (*to the* SERVANT)

Pour out also for me and give me some of this meat.

TRYGAEUS

No, the blessed gods won't allow it yet; let us drink; and as for you, get you gone, for that's their will. Mighty Peace! stay ever in our midst.

HIEROCLES

Bring the tongue hither.

TRYGAEUS

Relieve us of your own.

HIEROCLES

The libation.

TRYGAEUS

Here! and this into the bargain. (*He strikes him.*)

HIEROCLES

You will not give me any meat?

TRYGAEUS

We cannot give you any until the wolf unites with the sheep.

HIEROCLES

I will embrace your knees.

TRYGAEUS

'Tis lost labour, good fellow; you will never smooth the rough spikes of the hedgehog. . . . Come, spectators, join us in our feast.

HIEROCLES

And what am I to do?

TRYGAEUS

You? go and eat the Sibyl.

HIEROCLES

No, by the Earth! no, you shall not eat without me; if you do not give, I shall take; it's common property.

TRYGAEUS (*to the* SERVANT)

Strike, strike this Bacis, this humbugging soothsayer.

HIEROCLES

I take to witness . . .

TRYGAEUS

And I also, that you are a glutton and an impostor. (*To the* SERVANT) Hold him tight and I'll beat the impostor with a stick.

SERVANT

You look to that; I will snatch the skin from him which he has stolen from us.

TRYGAEUS

Let go that skin, you priest from hell! do you hear! Oh! what a fine crow has come from Oreus! Stretch your wings quickly for Elymnium.

(HIEROCLES *flees.* TRYGAEUS *and the* SERVANT *go into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! joy, joy! no more helmet, no more cheese nor onions! No, I have no passion for battles; what I love is to drink with good comrades in the corner by the fire when good dry wood, cut in the height of the summer, is crackling; it is to cook pease on the coals and beechnuts among the embers, it is to kiss our pretty Thracian while my wife is at the bath.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nothing is more pleasing, when the rain is sprouting our sowings, than to chat with some friend, saying, "Tell me, Comarchides, what shall we do? I would willingly drink myself, while the heavens are watering our fields. Come, wife, cook three measures of beans, adding to them a little wheat, and give us some figs. Syra! call Manes off the fields, it's impossible to prune the vine or to align the ridges, for the ground is too wet today. Let someone bring me the thrush and those two chaffinches; there were also some curds and four pieces of hare, unless the cat stole them last evening, for I know not what the infernal noise was that I heard in the house. Serve up three of the pieces for me, slave, and give the fourth to my father. Go and ask Aeschinades for some myrtle branches with berries on them, and then, for it's on the same road, invite Charinades to come and drink with me to the honour of the gods who watch over our crops."

CHORUS (*singing*)

When the grasshopper sings his dulcet tune, I love to see the Lemnian vines beginning to ripen, the earliest plant of all. Likewise I love to watch the fig filling out, and when it has reached maturity I eat it with appreciation, exclaiming, "Oh! delightful season!" Then too I bruise some thyme and infuse it in water. Indeed I grow a great deal fatter passing the summer in this way . . .

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

. . . than in watching a damned lieutenant with three plumes and military cloak of crimson, very livid indeed; he calls it the real Sardian purple, but if he ever has to fight in this cloak he'll dye it another colour, the real Cyzicene yellow, he the first to run away, shaking his plumes like a buff hippalectryon, and I am left to do the real work. Once back again in Athens, these brave fellows behave abominably; they write down these, they scratch through others, and this backwards and forwards two or

three times at random. The departure is set for to-morrow, and some citizen has brought no provisions, because he didn't know he had to go; he stops in front of the statue of Pandion, reads his name, is dumbfounded and starts away at a run, weeping bitter tears. The townsfolk are less ill-used, but that is how the husbandmen are treated by these men of war, the hated of the gods and of men, who know nothing but how to throw away their shield. For this reason, if it please heaven, I propose to call these rascals to account, for they are lions in times of peace, but sneaking foxes when it comes to fighting.

TRYGAEUS (*coming out of his house, followed by the* SERVANT)

Oh! oh! what a crowd for the nuptial feast! Here! dust the tables with this crest, which is good for nothing else now. Halloa! produce the cakes, the thrushes, plenty of good jugged hare and the little loaves.

(*A* SICKLE-MAKER *enters with a comrade; one carries sickles, the other casks.*)

SICKLE-MAKER

Trygaeus, where is Trygaeus?

TRYGAEUS

I am cooking the thrushes.

SICKLE-MAKER

Trygaeus, my best of friends, what a fine stroke of business you have done for me by bringing back Peace! Formerly my sickles would not have sold at an obolus apiece, to-day I am being paid fifty drachmae for every one. And here is a neighbour who is selling his casks for the country at three drachmae each. So come, Trygaeus, take as many sickles and casks as you will for nothing. Accept them for nothing; it's because of our handsome profits on our sales that we offer you these wedding presents.

TRYGAEUS

Thanks. Put them all down inside there, and come along quick to the banquet. Ah! do you see that armourer yonder coming with a wry face?

(*Enter an armourer, followed by other personages who represent the various specialized trades which have profited by the war, a crest-maker, a manufacturer of breastplates, a trumpet-maker, a helmet-maker, a polisher of lances; each carries a sample of his products. The armourer is the only one who speaks.*)

ARMOURER

Alas! alas! Trygaeus, you have ruined me utterly.

TRYGAEUS

What! won't the crests go any more, friend?

ARMOURER

You have killed my business, my livelihood, and that of this poor lance-maker too.

TRYGAEUS

Come, come, what are you asking for these two crests?

ARMOURER

What do you bid for them?

TRYGAEUS

What do I bid? Oh! I am ashamed to say. Still, as the clasp is of good workmanship, I would give two, even three measures of dried figs; I could use them for dusting the table.

ARMOURER

All right, tell them to bring me the dried figs. (*To the crest-maker*) That's better than nothing, my friend.

TRYGAEUS

Take them away, be off with your crests and get you gone; they are moulting, they are losing all their hair; I would not give a single fig for them.

ARMOURER

Good gods, what am I going to do with this fine ten-mina breastplate, which is so splendidly made?

TRYGAEUS

Oh, you will lose nothing over it. Sell it to me at cost price. It would be very useful as a thunder-mug . . .

ARMOURER

Cease your insults, both to me and my wares.

TRYGAEUS

. . . if propped on three stones. (*He sits on it.*) Look, it's admirable.

ARMOURER

But how can you wipe yourself, idiot?

TRYGAEUS (*with appropriate gestures*)

I can put one hand through here, and the other there, and so . . .

ARMOURER

What! do you wipe yourself with both hands?

TRYGAEUS

Aye, so that I may not be accused of robbing the State, by blocking up an oar-hole in the galley.[21]

ARMOURER

Would you crap in a thunder-mug that cost ten minae?

TRYGAEUS

Undoubtedly, you rascal. Do you think I would sell my arse for a thousand drachmae?

ARMOURER

Come, have the money paid over to me.

TRYGAEUS

No, friend; I find it pinches my bottom. Take it away, I won't buy it.

ARMOURER

What is to be done with this trumpet, for which I gave sixty drachmæ the other day?

TRYGAEUS

Pour lead into the hollow and fit a good, long stick to the top; and you will have a balanced cottabus.

ARMOURER

Don't mock me.

TRYGAEUS

Well, here's another idea. Pour in lead as I said, add here a dish hung on strings, and you will have a balance for weighing the figs which you give your slaves in the fields.

ARMOURER

Cursed fate! I am ruined. Here are helmets, for which I gave a mina each. What am I to do with them? who will buy them?

TRYGAEUS

Go and sell them to the Egyptians; they will do for measuring laxatives.

ARMOURER

Ah! poor helmet-maker, things are indeed in a bad way.

TRYGAEUS

He has no cause for complaint.

ARMOURER

But helmets will be no more used.

TRYGAEUS

Let him learn to fit a handle to them and he can sell them for more money.

ARMOURER

Let us be off, comrade.

TRYGAEUS

No, I want to buy these spears.

ARMOURER

What will you give?

TRYGAEUS

If they could be split in two, I would take them at a drachma per hundred to use as vine-props.

ARMOURER

The insolent dog! Let us go, friend.

(*The munitions-makers all depart.*)

TRYGAEUS (*as some young boys enter*)

Ah! here come the guests, young folks from the table to take a pee; I fancy they also want to hum over what they will be singing presently. Hi! child! what do you reckon to sing? Stand there and give me the opening line.

BOY

"Glory to the young warriors. . . ."[22]

TRYGAEUS

Oh! leave off about your young warriors, you little wretch; we are at peace and you are an idiot and a rascal.

BOY

"The skirmish begins, the hollow bucklers clash against each other."

TRYGAEUS

Bucklers! Leave me in peace with your bucklers.

BOY

"And then there came groanings and shouts of victory."

TRYGAEUS

Groanings! ah! by Bacchus! look out for yourself, you cursed squaller, if you start wearying us again with your groanings and hollow bucklers.

BOY

Then what should I sing? Tell me what pleases you.

TRYGAEUS

" 'Tis thus they feasted on the flesh of oxen," or something similar, as, for instance, "Everything that could tickle the palate was placed on the table."

BOY

" 'Tis thus they feasted on the flesh of oxen and, tired of warfare, unharnessed their foaming steeds."

TRYGAEUS

That's splendid; tired of warfare, they seat themselves at table; sing, sing to us how they still go on eating after they are satiated.

BOY

"The meal over, they girded themselves . . ."

TRYGAEUS

With good wine, no doubt?

BOY

". . . with armour and rushed forth from the towers, and a terrible shout arose."[23]

TRYGAEUS

Get you gone, you little scapegrace, you and your battles! You sing of nothing but warfare. Who is your father then?

BOY

My father?

TRYGAEUS

Why yes, your father.

BOY

I am Lamachus' son.

TRYGAEUS

Oh! oh! I could indeed have sworn, when I was listening to you, that you were the son of some warrior, who dreams of nothing but wounds and bruises, of some Bulomachus or Clausimachus; go and sing your plaguey songs to the spearmen. . . . Where is the son of Cleonymus? Sing me something before going back to the feast. I am at least certain he will not sing of battles, for his father is far too careful a man.

SON OF CLEONYMUS

"A Saian is parading with the spotless shield which I regret to say I have thrown into a thicket."

TRYGAEUS

Tell me, you little good-for-nothing, are you singing that for your father?

SON OF CLEONYMUS

"But I saved my life." [24]

TRYGAEUS

And dishonoured your family. But let us go in; I am very certain, that being the son of such a father, you will never forget this song of the buckler. (*To the* CHORUS) You, who remain to the feast, it's your duty to devour dish after dish and not to ply empty jaws. Come, put heart into the work and eat with your mouths full. For, believe me, poor friends, white teeth are useless furniture if they chew nothing.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to* TRYGAEUS, *who is going into the house*)

Never fear; thanks all the same for your good advice. (*To the* CHORUS) And all of you, who yesterday were dying of hunger, come, stuff yourselves with this fine hare-stew; it's not every day that we find cakes lying neglected. Eat, eat, or I predict you will soon regret it.

TRYGAEUS (*coming out of the house*)

Silence! Keep silence! Here is the bride about to appear! Take nuptial torches and let all rejoice and join in our songs. Then, when we have danced, clinked our cups and thrown Hyperbolus through the doorway we will carry back all our farming tools to the fields and shall pray the gods to give wealth to the Greeks and to cause us all to gather in an abundant barley harvest, enjoy a noble vintage, to grant that we may choke with good figs, that our wives may prove fruitful, that in fact we may recover all our lost blessings, and that the sparkling fire may be restored to the hearth. (OPORA *comes out of the house, followed by torch-bearing slaves.*) Come, wife, to the fields and seek, my beauty, to brighten and enliven my nights. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! thrice happy man, who so well deserve your good fortune! Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

What shall we do to her?

CHORUS (*singing*)

What shall we do to her?

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

We will gather her kisses.

CHORUS (*singing*)

We will gather her kisses.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*singing*)

But come, comrades, we who are in the first row, let us pick up the bridegroom and carry him in triumph. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus! Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

You shall have a fine house, no cares and the finest of figs. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus! Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*singing*)

The bridegroom's fig is great and thick; the bride's very soft and tender.

TRYGAEUS (*singing*)

While eating and drinking deep draughts of wine, continue to repeat: Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus! Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus! Hail, hail, my friends. All who come with me shall have cakes galore.

1. Zeus often bore the epithet *kataibatos,* "he who descends in thunder"; Aristophanes has added one letter and coined *skataibatos,* "he who descends in ordure." A French translator renders this as *Zeus Merdoyant, kataibatos* being *Foudroyant.*

2. "Going to the crows" was the ancient way of "going to Hell."

3. According to the fable the eagle and the beetle were at war; the eagle devoured the beetle's young and the latter retaliated by getting into its nest and tumbling out its eggs. The eagle then complained to Zeus and was advised to lay its eggs in his bosom; the beetle then flew up to the house of Zeus and began buzzing around his ears. When he rose to chase the insect away the eagle's eggs fell to the earth and were smashed to bits.

4. Euripides was often censured by the critics and laughed at by the comic poets because of the wretchedness of so many of his heroes. See *The Acharnians* (411 ff.).

5. The Spartan pestle was Brasidas; see the Glossary.

6. The usual fare of soldiers was bread, cheese, and onions.

7. See under Mysteries in the Glossary.

8. This is a reference to the fact that Athens' life depended on the maintenance of her naval supremacy.

9. This was a consequence of the Spartan invasions of Attica, which had taken place in almost every year of the war.

10. The tanner is, of course, Cleon. The following remarks of Trygaeus have always excited the sentimentalists, who readily forget the hostility of everything else that is said about Cleon in this play and eagerly foist upon Aristophanes a number of emotions utterly foreign to his age and repugnant to his personality. He was far too realistic to impute all the cardinal virtues to any dead scoundrel and what Trygaeus means is simply that the demagogue, now that he is dead and there is no longer any ulterior reason for attacking him, has ceased to have much value as a source of satirical humour. This does not, however, prevent him from making the familiar jest about leather, only a few lines below. How tightly the sentimentalists have to squint to see themselves mirrored in Aristophanes!

11. The ancients used infusions of penny-royal to alleviate the colic occasioned by excessive consumption of fruit.

12. The Heracles of comedy, traditionally a gluttonous buffoon, was a stock character that even Aristophanes, despite the disdain of the present remark, found useful on occasion, see *The Birds* (1574 ff.). The Heracles of Euripides' *Alcestis* is not far removed from his comic prototype.

13. These four lines are repeated verbatim from the parabasis of *The Wasps*.

14. This whole passage is one of the most brilliant examples of sustained and varied *double entendre* in ancient literature. The only point requiring comment is the Senate's cooking; this was the roasting, on a spit, of meats before the sacrifice; cf. a similar jest in *The Acharnians* (796).

15. One of the offices of the Prytanes was to introduce those who asked admission to the Senate, but it would seem that none could obtain this favour without payment. The refusal was most often made on the pretext of a festival, and such celebrations were extraordinarily numerous in the Athenian calendar. Thus the man who refused to be mulcted might have to wait a long time.

16. There is a pun here on the Greek words *bous,* "bull" and *boethein,* "to aid in battle."

17. Before sacrificing, the officiating person asked, "Who is here?" and those present answered, "Many good men."

18. At sacrifices the tail was cut off the victim and thrown into the fire. From the way it burnt one was supposed to be able to tell whether or not the sacrifice was agreeable to the deity.

19. The first offering was the part that belonged to the priest or diviner. Hierocles expects to receive this and is thus eager to see it cut off.

20. This "oracle" is not a real passage from Homer, but merely a sort of cento of epic formulae, improvised by Trygaeus to suit the occasion. The next one, however, is correctly quoted from the Iliad (IX, 63 f).

21. The trierarchs, those officials whose duty it was to man the ships of the Athenian navy, were wont to supply an inadequate number of rowers and thus to save or to embezzle some of the wages which they or the state had to pay. In order to render the deficiency less obvious they would stop up the oar-holes at which rowers should have been and were not.

22. This is the opening line of *The Epigoni*, a post-Homeric epic which recounted the second and successful attack of the Argive army on the city of Thebes. The first attack, which was a failure, forms the subject of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*.

23. These lines are a sort of gentleman's quotation of *Iliad* IV, 446 ff.

24. This is a quotation from one of the most famous of the elegies of the Greek poet Archilochus of Paros; because of his unsoldierly conduct he is reported to have been forbidden to enter Spartan territory.

VI
THE BIRDS

Characters in the Play

Euelpides
Pithetaerus
Trochilus, *Servant to Epops*
Epops (*the Hoopoe*)
A Bird
A Herald
A Priest
A Poet
An Oracle-monger
Meton, *a Geometrician*
An Inspector
A Dealer in Decrees
Iris
A Parricide
Cinesias, *a Dithyrambic Poet*
An Informer
Prometheus
Posidon
Triballus
Heracles
Slaves of Pithetaerus
Messengers
Chorus of Birds

INTRODUCTION

AFTER the production of *Peace* there intervene six years during which Aristophanes' literary activity is so lost to our view that we are by no means certain that he wrote for the theatre at all, and a copious list of titles preserved from plays that have not survived exhibits few that we may, and none that we must, assign to the years 420–415. In 414, however, the dramatist effected a twofold reappearance on the Athenian stage, and the Lenaean festival was graced with the lost *Amphiaraus*, while at the Great Dionysia the poet produced *The Birds*, which we have the great good fortune to possess. The play is the longest and the most lyrical of the eleven that have come down to us, and its general merits are such that the relatively small amount of bawdiness in it has led many to designate it as the finest, or at least the most delightful, of Aristophanes' compositions. This judgment, however, was not shared by the Athenian spectators, and the poet had to content himself with the second prize, but the inadequate award will surprise only those who have read the victorious *Knights* with insufficient candour or total absence of taste. *The Birds* is just such a comedy as the auguries evinced in the earlier creations of the poet's art have led us to expect, but it is also the first extant play which embodies the Utopian theme that is to dominate so much of Aristophanes' later work, and its central position as the sixth of the eleven thus acquires a more than chronological significance. Unfortunately it is no less fruitless than fascinating to speculate on the question of how much this is due to a desire on the poet's part to find in his comic Republics an escape from a world which he thought both misguided and incorrigible, and how much to his constant and enthusiastic effort fully to exploit every possibility offered by the traditional form of the Old Comedy. An important and primordial feature of this form was the *Gamos*, which had often been specialized into a motif of rejuvenation, and even in some of the earlier plays we may discern the beginnings of a generalization and extension whereby the rejuvenation is no longer effected in the individual alone, but in the society or the state as a whole. Such are the aims of Demos in *The Knights*, after Agoracritus has freshened him up on his stove, and the concluding scenes of *Peace* more closely approximate the realization of

similar dreams. But in these comedies the rejuvenation of society is subordinate and subsequent to the attainment of a particular political aim; in *The Birds* it has attained its full maturity and becomes the central motif of a comedy which is wholly political in its theme without taking a stand or making an attack on any specific political issue.

The opening scene introduces us to a pair of typical Athenians, Euelpides and Pithetaerus, whose patience has been so thoroughly exhausted by the stupidities and the annoyances of life in Athens that they have resolved to seek habitation elsewhere. Remembering the myth that Epops, the hoopoe, had once, long ago, been a man, they trudge before us on their long journey to consult, instead of the customary Pythian priestess, the metamorphosed Tereus, and thus to derive double advantage from the survivals of his human sympathies and the extent of his geographic knowledge. Before leaving Athens they have purchased winged pets from a bird-seller, to direct them on their adventure, and these hitherto disappointing guides now exhibit their true worth and indicate to their owners that they have reached their destination. After duly knocking on a nearby rock Euelpides attracts the attention of Trochilus, the slave of Epops, who suddenly rushes forth from the thicket in which his master dwells, and by his terrifying aspect chills the hearts and moves the bowels of the eminently human Athenians. He is finally prevailed upon to summon Epops, and Euelpides details the Sybaritic characteristics of the society they are looking for. A number of places are suggested by Epops and rejected, for typically Athenian reasons, by Euelpides, and just as the latter is rather diffidently enquiring what it is like to live with the birds, Pithetaerus, who has been silent for some time, suddenly bursts forth with a grandiose and thoroughly Athenian scheme whereby the supreme power of the universe may be put into the hands of the birds. The central position of their habitat will enable them to dominate the gods by intercepting their sacrificial supplies and they can terrorize mankind by the threat of devastating the crops. Epops is quickly enchanted with the plan and summons his aerial countrymen to a debate on the question, thus motivating the entrance of the Chorus.

A gaudy variety of winged creatures now assembles from all parts of the world, but Pithetaerus' magnificent schemes seem for a while destined to meet with premature frustration because of the inability of the birds to control their anger at the presumptuousness which has prompted two of their ancestral enemies to invade their domain. They are about to peck out the eyes of the terrified Athenians, who hurriedly arm themselves with kitchen utensils, but Epops finally succeeds in calming their wrath and inducing them to listen to the splendid proposals of Pithetaerus. With characteristic plausibility the Athenian demonstrates that the birds were the lords of the universe long before the Olympians, and convinces his

astonished auditors that with their cooperation he and Euelpides will re-establish them in their pristine supremacy. The Chorus enthusiastically supports the plan and the two Athenians follow Epops into his thicket, to procure wings for themselves and to work out the details of the project.

The stage is now left to the Chorus, which delivers the parabasis. The anapests, introduced by a brief lyric passage on the charms of Procné, the nightingale mate of Epops, recount the origin and early history of the world as the birds conceive it, and add to this a list of the services which they render mankind and of the reasons why men should worship the birds as gods. The ode is a lovely lyric, interspersed with bird-calls, on the theme of the music produced by the birds. The epirrheme details the advantages of life with the birds. The antode is thematically similar to the ode, but surpasses it in poetic beauty. The antepirrheme catalogues the advantages of possessing wings. Nowhere in this comedy is its essentially general nature more clearly exhibited than here in the parabasis, where we expect a definite exposition of the dramatist's views or advice on some particular political question.

At the conclusion of the parabasis Pithetaerus and Euelpides, now equipped with wings, emerge from the thicket and set about the organization of the new city, which is forthwith named Nephelococcygia and placed under the protection of Athené Polias. Euelpides is dispatched on a complicated errand, and a priest is summoned to perform a sacrifice, but he never concludes the endless list of the birds to whom prayers are to be addressed, and Pithetaerus, in desperation, takes over the sacrifice himself. He is interrupted, however, by the arrival of a series of familiar and typically Athenian nuisances, who have learned of the new city and are now eager to ply their trades in fresh, and presumably more profitable, surroundings. Accordingly Pithetaerus is compelled to beat off, in increasingly rapid succession, a poet who would hymn the glories of Nephelococcygia, an oracle-monger bursting with sayings of Bacis, Meton, the great mathematician and calendar-reformer, who would exercise his geometry in the planning of the town, an inspector sent out by the ever alert and meddlesome Athens, and a seller of decrees, who arrives with a complete set of laws for the government of the city. Pithetaerus now perceives that he will never be given an opportunity to finish his sacrifice if he stays in the open; he accordingly goes into the thicket, and the stage is for the second time left to the Chorus, which delivers what is very nearly a second parabasis. There are no anapests, and hence the passage is not a parabasis in the strictest sense of the term, but we find an ode celebrating the new power of the birds, an epirrheme which puts a price on the head of Philocrates, the bird-seller, an antode extolling the happy life which the birds enjoy, and an antepirrheme advising the judges to award the victory to this comedy.

As soon as this has been delivered, Pithetaerus comes out of the thicket and announces that the sacrificial omens are propitious. A messenger arrives and reports that the walls have been completed, and subjoins an account of the ingenious methods by which the birds have solved the problems of construction. The general rejoicing evoked by this news is short-lived, for soon another messenger arrives, bearing the dreadful tidings that a god has eluded the sentries and slipped into the city; the militia has been called out and war seems imminent, when the god appears in person and turns out to be an astonished and unsuspecting Iris bearing a message from Zeus to the human race. She is rudely informed of the developments that have taken place, and the erotic threats of Pithetaerus send her tearfully on her way to report the news to the other immortals. Immediately after her departure a herald arrives from the earth and communicates to Pithetaerus the information that a bird-mania has become epidemic in Athens; Nephelococcygia has quite displaced Sparta in the affections of the discontented, and no less than ten thousand Athenians are on their way to settle in the new Utopia. Thus Pithetaerus is again forced to expel a number of irritating pests, and a parricide, who has heard that the mores of the birds approve of beating one's father, Cinesias, the dithyrambic poet, who longs to "gather fresh songs in the clouds, in the midst of the vapours and the fleecy snow," and an informer, who perceives the manifold advantages of wings in his profession, are rapidly and successively driven off with blows or threats. As soon as the last of this trio has departed, a furtive and masked figure slinks in, carrying an umbrella; its identity is finally revealed and Pithetaerus affectionately greets Prometheus, who, true to his traditional love of mankind and hatred of the gods, provides the founder of Nephelococcygia with preliminary information on the sad state of affairs which prevails amongst the Olympians, and with advice on how to handle the divine embassy which is on its way to conclude a treaty with the new and formidable city of the birds. The Chorus sings a brief ode and Pithetaerus commences the preparation of a splendid repast, when the Olympian delegation arrives, made up of Posidon, Heracles, and Triballus, a ridiculous and barbarous Thracian deity. "Oh! Democracy," exclaims the aristocratic Posidon, "whither, oh! whither are you leading us?" Pithetaerus demands that Zeus yield his sceptre to the birds and that Basileia, the personification of sovereignty, be given to him in marriage. Posidon gallantly refuses, but Heracles is immediately prejudiced in favour of Pithetaerus by the sight and the smell of the victuals he is preparing, and he easily forces or misinterprets Triballus into taking his side. The majority opinion thus enjoins complete capitulation to the requests of Pithetaerus, and the comedy ends with the *Hymenaeus* for his marriage to Basileia and Hosannas of praise in honour of the new lord of the universe.

Such is the plot of this beautiful and diversified comedy, a bright tissue of the purest and happiest fantasy, constructed with consummate skill, a song of unalloyed gaiety with never a false or bitter note. If its date had not been handed down to us, surely no one would suspect that it was written under the shadow of the impending Athenian debâcle in Sicily and only a year after the mutilation of the Hermae with its resultant psychoses of superstitious fear and savage vindictiveness. Only an isolated and ambiguous reference to the recall of Alcibiades suggests contemporary events; the rest of the play is written not for the year 414 but almost for the period of 459–404. This approach to timelessness is at once an explanation of why *The Birds* did not win the first prize, a foreshadowing of the New Comedy, and a testimony to the fact that forms of art develop in opposition, not in response, to the popular taste.

THE BIRDS

(SCENE:—*A wild and desolate region; only thickets, rocks, and a single tree are seen.* EUELPIDES *and* PITHETAERUS *enter, each with a bird in his hand.*)

EUELPIDES (*to his jay*)

Do you think I should walk straight for yon tree?

PITHETAERUS (*to his crow*)

Cursed beast, what are you croaking to me? . . . to retrace my steps?

EUELPIDES

Why, you wretch, we are wandering at random, we are exerting ourselves only to return to the same spot; we're wasting our time.

PITHETAERUS

To think that I should trust to this crow, which has made me cover more than a thousand furlongs!

EUELPIDES

And that I, in obedience to this jay, should have worn my toes down to the nails!

PITHETAERUS

If only I knew where we were. . . .

EUELPIDES

Could you find your country again from here?

PITHETAERUS

No, I feel quite sure I could not, any more than could Execestides find his.

EUELPIDES

Alas!

PITHETAERUS

Aye, aye, my friend, it's surely the road of "alases" we are following.

EUELPIDES

That Philocrates, the bird-seller, played us a scurvy trick, when he pretended these two guides could help us to find Tereus, the Epops, who is a bird, without being born of one. He has indeed sold us this jay, a true son of Tharrhelides, for an obolus, and this crow for three, but what can they do? Why, nothing whatever but bite and scratch! (*To his jay*) What's the matter with you then, that you keep opening your beak? Do you want us to fling ourselves headlong down these rocks? There is no road that way.

PITHETAERUS

Not even the vestige of a trail in any direction

EUELPIDES

And what does the crow say about the road to follow?

PITHETAERUS

By Zeus, it no longer croaks the same thing it did.

EUELPIDES

And which way does it tell us to go now?

PITHETAERUS

It says that, by dint of gnawing, it will devour my fingers.

EUELPIDES

What misfortune is ours! we strain every nerve to get to the crows, do everything we can to that end, and we cannot find our way! Yes, spectators, our madness is quite different from that of Sacas. He is not a citizen, and would fain be one at any cost; we, on the contrary, born of an honourable tribe and family and living in the midst of our fellow-citizens, we have fled from our country as hard as ever we could go. It's not that we hate it; we recognize it to be great and rich, likewise that everyone has the right to ruin himself paying taxes; but the crickets only chirrup among the fig-trees for a month or two, whereas the Athenians spend their whole lives in chanting forth judgments from their law-courts. That is why we started off with a basket, a stew-pot and some myrtle boughs [1] and have come to seek a quiet country in which to settle. We are going to Tereus, the Epops, to learn from him, whether, in his aerial flights, he has noticed some town of this kind.

PITHETAERUS

Here! look!

EUELPIDES

What's the matter?

PITHETAERUS

Why, the crow has been directing me to something up there for some time now.

EUELPIDES

And the jay is also opening it beak and craning its neck to show me I know not what. Clearly, there are some birds about here. We shall soon know, if we kick up a noise to start them.

PITHETAERUS

Do you know what to do? Knock your leg against this rock.

EUELPIDES

And you your head to double the noise.

PITHETAERUS

Well then use a stone instead, take one and hammer with it.

EUELPIDES

Good idea! (*He does so.*) Ho there, within! Slave! slave!

PITHETAERUS

What's that, friend! You say, "slave," to summon Epops? It would be much better to shout, "Epops, Epops!"

EUELPIDES

Well then, Epops! Must I knock again? Epops!

TROCHILUS (*rushing out of a thicket*)

Who's there? Who calls my master?

PITHETAERUS (*in terror*)

Apollo the Deliverer! what an enormous beak!
(*He defecates. In the confusion both the jay and the crow fly away.*)

TROCHILUS (*equally frightened*)

Good god! they are bird-catchers.

EUELPIDES (*reassuring himself*)

But is it so terrible? Wouldn't it be better to explain things?

TROCHILUS (*also reassuring himself*)

You're done for.

EUELPIDES

But we are not men.

TROCHILUS

What are you, then?

EUELPIDES (*defecating also*)

I am the Fearling, an African bird.

TROCHILUS

You talk nonsense.

EUELPIDES

Well, then, just ask it of my feet.

TROCHILUS

And this other one, what bird is it? (*To* PITHETAERUS) Speak up!

PITHETAERUS (*weakly*)

I? I am a Crapple, from the land of the pheasants.

EUELPIDES

But you yourself, in the name of the gods! what animal are you?

TROCHILUS

Why, I am a slave-bird.

EUELPIDES

Why, have you been conquered by a cock?

TROCHILUS

No, but when my master was turned into a hoopoe, he begged me to become a bird also, to follow and to serve him.

EUELPIDES

Does a bird need a servant, then?

TROCHILUS

That's no doubt because he was once a man. At times he wants to eat a dish of sardines from Phalerum; I seize my dish and fly to fetch him some. Again he wants some pea-soup; I seize a ladle and a pot and run to get it.

EUELPIDES

This is, then, truly a running-bird. Come, Trochilus, do us the kindness to call your master.

TROCHILUS

Why, he has just fallen asleep after a feed of myrtle-berries and a few grubs.

EUELPIDES

Never mind; wake him up.

TROCHILUS

I am certain he will be angry. However, I will wake him to please you.

(*He goes back into the thicket.*)

PITHETAERUS (*as soon as* TROCHILUS *is out of sight*)

You cursed brute! why, I am almost dead with terror!

EUELPIDES

Oh! my god! it was sheer fear that made me lose my jay.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! you big coward! were you so frightened that you let go your jay?

EUELPIDES

And did you not lose your crow, when you fell sprawling on the ground? Tell me that.

PITHETAERUS

Not at all.

EUELPIDES

Where is it, then?

PITHETAERUS

It flew away.

EUELPIDES

And you did not let it go? Oh! you brave fellow!

EPOPS (*from within*)

Open the thicket, that I may go out!

(*He comes out of the thicket.*)

EUELPIDES

By Heracles! what a creature! what plumage! What means this triple crest?

EPOPS

Who wants me?

EUELPIDES (*banteringly*)

The twelve great gods have used you ill, it seems.[2]

EPOPS

Are you twitting me about my feathers? I have been a man, strangers.

EUELPIDES

It's not you we are jeering at.

EPOPS

At what, then?

EUELPIDES

Why, it's your beak that looks so ridiculous to us.

EPOPS

This is how Sophocles outrages me in his tragedies. Know, I once was Tereus.

EUELPIDES

You were Tereus, and what are you now? a bird or a peacock?[3]

EPOPS

I am a bird.

EUELPIDES

Then where are your feathers? I don't see any.

EPOPS

They have fallen off.

EUELPIDES

Through illness?

EPOPS

No. All birds moult their feathers, you know, every winter, and others grow in their place. But tell me, who are you?

EUELPIDES

We? We are mortals.

EPOPS

From what country?

EUELPIDES

From the land of the beautiful galleys.[4]

EPOPS

Are you dicasts?

EUELPIDES

No, if anything, we are anti-dicasts.

EPOPS

Is that kind of seed sown among you?

EUELPIDES

You have to look hard to find even a little in our fields.

EPOPS

What brings you here?

EUELPIDES

We wish to pay you a visit.

EPOPS

What for?

EUELPIDES

Because you formerly were a man, like we are, formerly you had debts, as we have, formerly you did not want to pay them, like ourselves; furthermore, being turned into a bird, you have when flying seen all lands and seas. Thus you have all human knowledge as well as that of birds. And hence we have come to you to beg you to direct us to some cosy town, in which one can repose as if on thick coverlets.

EPOPS

And are you looking for a greater city than Athens?

EUELPIDES

No, not a greater, but one more pleasant to live in.

EPOPS

Then you are looking for an aristocratic country.

EUELPIDES

I? Not at all! I hold the son of Scellias in horror.

EPOPS

But, after all, what sort of city *would* please you best?

EUELPIDES

A place where the following would be the most important business transacted.—Some friend would come knocking at the door quite early in the morning saying, "By Olympian Zeus, be at my house early, as soon

as you have bathed, and bring your children too. I am giving a nuptial feast, so don't fail, or else don't cross my threshold when I am in distress."

EPOPS

Ah! that's what may be called being fond of hardships! (*To* PITHETAERUS) And what say you?

PITHETAERUS

My tastes are similar.

EPOPS

And they are?

PITHETAERUS

I want a town where the father of a handsome lad will stop in the street and say to me reproachfully as if I had failed him, "Ah! Is this well done, Stilbonides? You met my son coming from the bath after the gymnasium and you neither spoke to him, nor kissed him, nor took him with you, nor ever once felt his balls. Would anyone call you an old friend of mine?"

EPOPS

Ah! wag, I see you are fond of suffering. But there is a city of delights such as you want. It's on the Red Sea.

EUELPIDES

Oh, no. Not a sea-port, where some fine morning the Salaminian galley can appear, bringing a process-server along. Have you no Greek town you can propose to us?

EPOPS

Why not choose Lepreum in Elis for your settlement?

EUELPIDES

By Zeus! I could not look at Lepreum without disgust, because of Melanthius.

EPOPS

Then, again, there is the Opuntian Locris, where you could live.

EUELPIDES

I would not be Opuntian for a talent. But come, what is it like to live with the birds? You should know pretty well.

EPOPS

Why, it's not a disagreeable life. In the first place, one has no purse.

EUELPIDES

That does away with a lot of roguery.

EPOPS

For food the gardens yield us white sesame, myrtle-berries, poppies and mint.

EUELPIDES

Why, 'tis the life of the newly-wed indeed.

PITHETAERUS

Ha! I am beginning to see a great plan, which will transfer the supreme power to the birds, if you will but take my advice.

EPOPS

Take your advice? In what way?

PITHETAERUS

In what way? Well, firstly, do not fly in all directions with open beak; it is not dignified. Among us, when we see a thoughtless man, we ask, "What sort of bird is this?" and Teleas answers, "It's a man who has no brain, a bird that has lost his head, a creature you cannot catch, for it never remains in any one place."

EPOPS

By Zeus himself! your jest hits the mark. What then is to be done?

PITHETAERUS

Found a city.

EPOPS

We birds? But what sort of city should we build?

PITHETAERUS

Oh, really, really! you talk like such a fool! Look down.

EPOPS

I am looking.

PITHETAERUS

Now look up.

EPOPS

I am looking.

PITHETAERUS

Turn your head round.

EPOPS

Ah! it will be pleasant for me if I end in twisting my neck off!

PITHETAERUS

What have you seen?

EPOPS

The clouds and the sky.

PITHETAERUS

Very well! is not this the pole of the birds then?

EPOPS

How their pole?

PITHETAERUS

Or, if you like it, their place. And since it turns and passes through the whole universe, it is called 'pole.' If you build and fortify it, you will turn your pole into a city.[5] In this way you will reign over mankind as you do over the grasshoppers and you will cause the gods to die of rabid hunger.

EPOPS

How so?

PITHETAERUS

The air is between earth and heaven. When we want to go to Delphi, we ask the Boeotians for leave of passage; in the same way, when men sacrifice to the gods, unless the latter pay you tribute, you exercise the right of every nation towards strangers and don't allow the smoke of the sacrifices to pass through your city and territory.

EPOPS

By earth! by snares! by network! by cages! [6] I never heard of anything more cleverly conceived; and, if the other birds approve, I am going to build the city along with you.

PITHETAERUS

Who will explain the matter to them?

EPOPS

You must yourself. Before I came they were quite ignorant, but since I have lived with them I have taught them to speak.

PITHETAERUS

But how can they be gathered together?

EPOPS

Easily. I will hasten down to the thicket to waken my dear Procné and as soon as they hear our voices, they will come to us hot wing.

PITHETAERUS

My dear bird, lose no time, please! Fly at once into the thicket and awaken Procné.

(EPOPS *rushes into the thicket.*)

EPOPS (*from within; singing*)

Chase off drowsy sleep, dear companion. Let the sacred hymn gush from thy divine throat in melodious strains; roll forth in soft cadence your refreshing melodies to bewail the fate of Itys, which has been the cause of so many tears to us both. Your pure notes rise through the thick leaves of the yew-tree right up to the throne of Zeus, where Phoebus listens to you, Phoebus with his golden hair. And his ivory lyre responds to your plaintive accents; he gathers the choir of the gods and from their immortal lips pours forth a sacred chant of blessed voices.

(*The flute is played behind the scene, imitating the song of the nightingale.*)

PITHETAERUS

Oh! by Zeus! what a throat that little bird possesses. He has filled the whole thicket with honey-sweet melody!

EUELPIDES

Hush!

PITHETAERUS

What's the matter?

EUELPIDES

Be still!

PITHETAERUS

What for?

EUELPIDES

Epops is going to sing again.

EPOPS (*in the thicket, singing*)

Epopopoi popoi popopopoi popoi, here, here, quick, quick, quick, my comrades in the air; all you who pillage the fertile lands of the husbandmen, the numberless tribes who gather and devour the barley seeds, the swift flying race that sings so sweetly. And you whose

gentle twitter resounds through the fields with the little cry of *tiotio-tiotiotiotiotiotio;* and you who hop about the branches of the ivy in the gardens; the mountain birds, who feed on the wild olive-berries or the arbutus, hurry to come at my call, *trioto, trioto, totobrix;* you also, who snap up the sharp-stinging gnats in the marshy vales, and you who dwell in the fine plain of Marathon, all damp with dew, and you, the francolin with speckled wings; you too, the halcyons, who flit over the swelling waves of the sea, come hither to hear the tidings; let all the tribes of long-necked birds assemble here; know that a clever old man has come to us, bringing an entirely new idea and proposing great reforms. Let all come to the debate here, here, here, here. *Torotorotorotorotix, kikkabau, kikkabau, torotorotoro-lililix.*

PITHETAERUS

Can you see any bird?

EUELPIDES

By Phoebus, no! and yet I am straining my eyesight to scan the sky.

PITHETAERUS

It was hardly worth Epops' while to go and bury himself in the thicket like a hatching plover.

A BIRD (*entering*)

Torotix, torotix.

PITHETAERUS

Wait, friend, there's a bird.

EUELPIDES

By Zeus, it *is* a bird, but what kind? Isn't it a peacock?

PITHETAERUS (*as* EPOPS *comes out of the thicket*)

Epops will tell us. What is this bird?

EPOPS

It's not one of those you are used to seeing; it's a bird from the marshes.

EUELPIDES

Oh! oh! but he is very handsome with his wings as crimson as flame.

EPOPS

Undoubtedly; indeed he is called flamingo.

EUELPIDES (*excitedly*)

Hi! I say! You!

PITHETAERUS

What are you shouting for?

EUELPIDES

Why, here's another bird.

PITHETAERUS

Aye, indeed; this one's a foreign bird too. (*To* EPOPS) What is this bird from beyond the mountains with a look as solemn as it is stupid?

EPOPS

He is called the Mede.[7]

EUELPIDES

The Mede! But, by Heracles, how, if a Mede, has he flown here without a camel?

PITHETAERUS

Here's another bird with a crest.

(*From here on, the numerous birds that make up the* CHORUS *keep rushing in.*)

EUELPIDES

Ah! that's curious. I say, Epops, you are not the only one of your kind then?

EPOPS

This bird is the son of Philocles, who is the son of Epops; so that, you see, I am his grandfather; just as one might say, Hipponicus, the son of Callias, who is the son of Hipponicus.

EUELPIDES

Then this bird is Callias! Why, what a lot of his feathers he has lost!

EPOPS

That's because he is honest; so the informers set upon him and the women too pluck out his feathers.

EUELPIDES

By Posidon, do you see that many-coloured bird? What is his name?

EPOPS

This one? That's the glutton.

EUELPIDES

Is there another glutton besides Cleonymus? But why, if he is Cleonymus, has he not thrown away his crest? But what is the meaning of all

these crests? Have these birds come to contend for the double stadium prize? [8]

EPOPS

They are like the Carians, who cling to the crests of their mountains for greater safety.

PITHETAERUS

Oh, Posidon! look what awful swarms of birds are gathering here!

EUELPIDES

By Phoebus! what a cloud! The entrance to the stage is no longer visible so closely do they fly together.

PITHETAERUS

Here is the partridge.

EUELPIDES

Why, there is the francolin.

PITHETAERUS

There is the poachard.

EUELPIDES

Here is the kingfisher. (*To* EPOPS) What's that bird behind the kingfisher?

EPOPS

That's the barber.

EUELPIDES

What? a bird a barber?

PITHETAERUS

Why, Sporgilus is one.

EPOPS

Here comes the owl.

EUELPIDES

And who is it brings an owl to Athens? [9]

EPOPS (*pointing to the various species*)

Here is the magpie, the turtle-dove, the swallow, the horned-owl, the buzzard, the pigeon, the falcon, the ring-dove, the cuckoo, the red-foot, the red-cap, the purple-cap, the kestrel, the diver, the ousel, the osprey, the woodpecker . . .

PITHETAERUS

Oh! what a lot of birds!

EUELPIDES

Oh! what a lot of blackbirds!

PITHETAERUS

How they scold, how they come rushing up! What a noise! what a noise!

EUELPIDES

Can they be bearing us ill-will?

PITHETAERUS

Oh! there! there! they are opening their beaks and staring at us.

EUELPIDES

Why, so they are.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Popopopopopo.[10] Where is he who called me? Where am I to find him?

EPOPS

I have been waiting for you a long while! I never fail in my word to my friends.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Tititititititi. What good news have you for me?

EPOPS

Something that concerns our common safety, and that is just as pleasant as it is to the point. Two men, who are subtle reasoners, have come here to seek me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Where? How? What are you saying?

EPOPS

I say, two old men have come from the abode of humans to propose a vast and splendid scheme to us.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! it's a horrible, unheard-of crime! What are you saying?

EPOPS

Never let my words scare you.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What have you done to me?

EPOPS

I have welcomed two men, who wish to live with us.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And you have dared to do that!

EPOPS

Yes, and I am delighted at having done so.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And are they already with us?

EPOPS

Just as much as I am.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ah! ah! we are betrayed; 'tis sacrilege! Our friend, he who picked up corn-seeds in the same plains as ourselves, has violated our ancient laws; he has broken the oaths that bind all birds; he has laid a snare for me, he has handed us over to the attacks of that impious race which, throughout all time, has never ceased to war against us.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

As for this traitorous bird, we will decide his case later, but the two old men shall be punished forthwith; we are going to tear them to pieces.

PITHETAERUS

It's all over with us.

EUELPIDES

You are the sole cause of all our trouble. Why did you bring me from down yonder?

PITHETAERUS

To have you with me.

EUELPIDES

Say rather to have me melt into tears.

PITHETAERUS

Go on! you are talking nonsense. How will you weep with your eyes pecked out?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Io! io! forward to the attack, throw yourselves upon the foe, spill his blood; take to your wings and surround them on all sides. Woe to them! let us get to work with our beaks, let us devour them. Nothing can save them from our wrath, neither the mountain forests, nor the clouds that float in the sky, nor the foaming deep.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, peck, tear to ribbons. Where is the chief of the cohort? Let him engage the right wing.

(*They rush at the two Athenians.*)

EUELPIDES

This is the fatal moment. Where shall I fly to, unfortunate wretch that I am?

PITHETAERUS

Wait! Stay here!

EUELPIDES

That they may tear me to pieces?

PITHETAERUS

And how do you think to escape them?

EUELPIDES

I don't know at all.

PITHETAERUS

Come, I will tell you. We must stop and fight them. Let us arm ourselves with these stew-pots.

EUELPIDES

Why with the stew-pots?

PITHETAERUS

The owl will not attack us then.[11]

EUELPIDES

But do you see all those hooked claws?

PITHETAERUS

Take the spit and pierce the foe on your side.

EUELPIDES

And how about my eyes?

PITHETAERUS

Protect them with this dish or this vinegar-pot.

EUELPIDES

Oh! what cleverness! what inventive genius! You are a great general, even greater than Nicias, where stratagem is concerned.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Forward, forward, charge with your beaks! Come, no delay. Tear, pluck, strike, flay them, and first of all smash the stew-pot.

EPOPS (*stepping in front of the* CHORUS)

Oh, most cruel of all animals, why tear these two men to pieces, why kill them? What have they done to you? They belong to the same tribe, to the same family as my wife.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Are wolves to be spared? Are they not our most mortal foes? So let us punish them.

EPOPS

If they are your foes by nature, they are your friends in heart, and they come here to give you useful advice.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Advice or a useful word from their lips, from them, the enemies of my forebears?

EPOPS

The wise can often profit by the lessons of a foe, for caution is the mother of safety. It is just such a thing as one will not learn from a friend and which an enemy compels you to know. To begin with, it's the foe and not the friend that taught cities to build high walls, to equip long vessels of war; and it's this knowledge that protects our children, our slaves and our wealth.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Well then, I agree, let us first hear them, for that is best; one can even learn something in an enemy's school.

PITHETAERUS (*to* EUELPIDES)

Their wrath seems to cool. Draw back a little.

EPOPS

It's only justice, and you will thank me later.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Never have we opposed your advice up to now.

PITHETAERUS

They are in a more peaceful mood; put down your stew-pot and your two dishes; spit in hand, doing duty for a spear, let us mount guard inside the camp close to the pot and watch in our arsenal closely; for we must not fly.

EUELPIDES

You are right. But where shall we be buried, if we die?

PITHETAERUS

In the Ceramicus; for, to get a public funeral, we shall tell the Strategi that we fell at Orneae, fighting the country's foes.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Return to your ranks and lay down your courage beside your wrath as the hoplites do. Then let us ask these men who they are, whence they come, and with what intent. Here, Epops, answer me.

EPOPS

Are you calling me? What do you want of me?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Who are they? From what country?

EPOPS

Strangers, who have come from Greece, the land of the wise.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And what fate has led them hither to the land of the birds?

EPOPS

Their love for you and their wish to share your kind of life; to dwell and remain with you always.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Indeed, and what are their plans?

EPOPS

They are wonderful, incredible, unheard of.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why, do they think to see some advantage that determines them to settle here? Are they hoping with our help to triumph over their foes or to be useful to their friends?

EPOPS

They speak of benefits so great it is impossible either to describe or conceive them; all shall be yours, all that we see here, there, above and below us; this they vouch for.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Are they mad?

EPOPS

They are the sanest people in the world.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Clever men?

EPOPS

The slyest of foxes, cleverness its very self, men of the world, cunning, the cream of knowing folk.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Tell them to speak and speak quickly; why, as I listen to you, I am beside myself with delight.

EPOPS (*to two attendants*)

Here, you there, take all these weapons and hang them up inside close to the fire, near the figure of the god who presides there and under his protection; (*to* PITHETAERUS) as for you, address the birds, tell them why I have gathered them together.

PITHETAERUS

Not I, by Apollo, unless they agree with me as the little ape of an armourer agreed with his wife, not to bite me, nor pull me by the balls, nor shove things into my . . .

EUELPIDES (*bending over and pointing his finger at his anus*)

Do you mean this?

PITHETAERUS

No, I mean my eyes.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Agreed.

PITHETAERUS

Swear it.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I swear it and, if I keep my promise, let judges and spectators give me the victory unanimously.

PITHETAERUS

It is a bargain.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And if I break my word, may I succeed by one vote only.

EPOPS (*as* HERALD)

Hearken, ye people! Hoplites, pick up your weapons and return to your firesides; do not fail to read the decrees of dismissal we have posted.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Man is a truly cunning creature, but nevertheless explain. Perhaps you are going to show me some good way to extend my power, some way that I have not had the wit to find out and which you have discovered. Speak! 'tis to your own interest as well as to mine, for if you secure me some advantage, I will surely share it with you.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But what object can have induced you to come among us? Speak boldly, for I shall not break the truce,—until you have told us all.

PITHETAERUS

I am bursting with desire to speak; I have already mixed the dough of my address and nothing prevents me from kneading it. . . . Slave! bring the chaplet and water, which you must pour over my hands. Be quick![12]

EUELPIDES

Is it a question of feasting? What does it all mean?

PITHETAERUS

By Zeus, no! but I am hunting for fine, tasty words to break down the hardness of their hearts. (*To the* CHORUS) I grieve so much for you, who at one time were kings . . .

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We kings? Over whom?

PITHETAERUS

. . . of all that exists, firstly of me and of this man, even of Zeus himself. Your race is older than Saturn, the Titans and the Earth.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What, older than the Earth!

PITHETAERUS

By Phoebus, yes.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

By Zeus, but I never knew that before!

PITHETAERUS

That's because you are ignorant and heedless, and have never read your Aesop. He is the one who tells us that the lark was born before all other creatures, indeed before the Earth; his father died of sickness, but the Earth did not exist then; he remained unburied for five days, when the bird in its dilemma decided, for want of a better place, to entomb its father in its own head.

EUELPIDES

So that the lark's father is buried at Cephalae.

PITHETAERUS

Hence, if they existed before the Earth, before the gods, the kingship belongs to them by right of priority.

EUELPIDES

Undoubtedly, but sharpen your beak well; Zeus won't be in a hurry to hand over his sceptre to the woodpecker.

PITHETAERUS

It was not the gods, but the birds, who were formerly the masters and kings over men; of this I have a thousand proofs. First of all, I will point you to the cock, who governed the Persians before all other monarchs, before Darius and Megabazus. It's in memory of his reign that he is called the Persian bird.

EUELPIDES

For this reason also, even to-day, he alone of all the birds wears his tiara straight on his head, like the Great King.

PITHETAERUS

He was so strong, so great, so feared, that even now, on account of his ancient power, everyone jumps out of bed as soon as ever he crows at daybreak. Blacksmiths, potters, tanners, shoemakers, bathmen, corn-dealers, lyre-makers and armourers, all put on their shoes and go to work before it is daylight.

EUELPIDES

I can tell you something about that. It was the cock's fault that I lost a splendid tunic of Phrygian wool. I was at a feast in town, given to celebrate the birth of a child; I had drunk pretty freely and had just fallen asleep, when a cock, I suppose in a greater hurry than the rest, began to crow. I thought it was dawn and set out for Halimus. I had hardly got beyond the walls, when a footpad struck me in the back with his bludgeon; down I went and wanted to shout, but he had already made off with my mantle.

PITHETAERUS

Formerly also the kite was ruler and king over the Greeks.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The Greeks?

PITHETAERUS

And when he was king, he was the one who first taught them to fall on their knees before the kites.[13]

EUELPIDES

By Zeus! that's what I did myself one day on seeing a kite; but at the moment I was on my knees, and leaning backwards with mouth agape, I bolted an obolus and was forced to carry my meal-sack home empty.[14]

PITHETAERUS

The cuckoo was king of Egypt and of the whole of Phoenicia. When he called out "cuckoo," all the Phoenicians hurried to the fields to reap their wheat and their barley.

EUELPIDES

Hence no doubt the proverb, "Cuckoo! cuckoo! go to the fields, ye circumcised."[15]

PITHETAERUS

So powerful were the birds that the kings of Grecian cities, Agamemnon, Menelaus, for instance, carried a bird on the tip of their sceptres, who had his share of all presents.

EUELPIDES

That I didn't know and was much astonished when I saw Priam come upon the stage in the tragedies with a bird, which kept watching Lysicrates to see if he got any present.

PITHETAERUS

But the strongest proof of all is that Zeus, who now reigns, is represented as standing with an eagle on his head as a symbol of his royalty; his daughter has an owl, and Phoebus, as his servant, has a hawk.

EUELPIDES

By Demeter, the point is well taken. But what are all these birds doing in heaven?

PITHETAERUS

When anyone sacrifices and, according to the rite, offers the entrails to the gods, these birds take their share before Zeus. Formerly men always swore by the birds and never by the gods.

EUELPIDES

And even now Lampon swears by the goose whenever he wishes to deceive someone.

PITHETAERUS

Thus it is clear that you were once great and sacred, but now you are looked upon as slaves, as fools, as Maneses; stones are thrown at you as at raving madmen, even in holy places. A crowd of bird-catchers sets snares, traps, limed twigs and nets of all sorts for you; you are caught, you are sold in heaps and the buyers finger you over to be certain you are fat. Again, if they would but serve you up simply roasted; but they rasp cheese into a mixture of oil, vinegar and laserwort, to which another sweet and greasy sauce is added, and the whole is poured scalding hot over your back, for all the world as if you were diseased meat.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Man, your words have made my heart bleed; I have groaned over the treachery of our fathers, who knew not how to transmit to us the high rank they held from their forefathers. But 'tis a benevolent Genius, a happy Fate, that sends you to us; you shall be our deliverer and I place the destiny of my little ones and my own in your hands with every confidence.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But hasten to tell me what must be done; we should not be worthy to live, if we did not seek to regain our royalty by every possible means.

PITHETAERUS

First I advise that the birds gather together in one city and that they build a wall of great bricks, like that at Babylon, round the plains of the air and the whole region of space that divides earth from heaven.

EPOPS

Oh, Cebriones! oh, Porphyrion! what a terribly strong place!

PITHETAERUS

Then, when this has been well done and completed, you demand back the empire from Zeus; if he will not agree, if he refuses and does not at once confess himself beaten, you declare a sacred war against him and forbid the gods henceforward to pass through your country with their tools up, as hitherto, for the purpose of laying their Alcmenas, their Alopés, or their Semelés! if they try to pass through, you put rings on their tools so that they can't make love any longer. You send another messenger to mankind, who will proclaim to them that the birds are kings, that for the future they must first of all sacrifice to them, and only afterwards to the gods; that it is fitting to appoint to each deity the bird that has most in common with it. For instance, are they sacrificing to Aphrodité, let them at the same time offer barley to the coot; are they immolating a sheep to Posidon, let them consecrate wheat in honour of the duck; if a steer is being offered to Heracles, let honey-cakes be dedicated to the gull; if a goat is being slain for King Zeus, there is a King-Bird, the wren, to whom the sacrifice of a male gnat is due before Zeus himself even.[16]

EUELPIDES

This notion of an immolated gnat delights me! And now let the great Zeus thunder!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But how will mankind recognize us as gods and not as jays? Us, who have wings and fly?

PITHETAERUS

You talk rubbish! Hermes is a god and has wings and flies, and so do many other gods. First of all, Victory flies with golden wings, Eros is undoubtedly winged too, and Iris is compared by Homer to a timorous dove.[17]

EUELPIDES

But will not Zeus thunder and send his wingéd bolts against us?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If men in their blindness do not recognize us as gods and so continue to worship the dwellers in Olympus?

PITHETAERUS

Then a cloud of sparrows greedy for corn must descend upon their fields and eat up all their seeds; we shall see then if Demeter will mete them out any wheat.

EUELPIDES

By Zeus, she'll take good care she does not, and you will see her inventing a thousand excuses.

PITHETAERUS

The crows too will prove your divinity to them by pecking out the eyes of their flocks and of their draught-oxen; and then let Apollo cure them, since he is a physician and is paid for the purpose.

EUELPIDES

Oh! don't do that! Wait first until I have sold my two young bullocks.

PITHETAERUS

If on the other hand they recognize that you are God, the principle of life, that you are Earth, Saturn, Posidon, they shall be loaded with benefits.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Name me one of these then.

PITHETAERUS

Firstly, the locusts shall not eat up their vine-blossoms; a legion of owls and kestrels will devour them. Moreover, the gnats and the gall-bugs shall no longer ravage the figs; a flock of thrushes shall swallow the whole host down to the very last.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And how shall we give wealth to mankind? This is their strongest passion.

PITHETAERUS

When they consult the omens, you will point them to the richest mines, you will reveal the paying ventures to the diviner, and not another shipwreck will happen or sailor perish.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No more shall perish? How is that?

PITHETAERUS

When the auguries are examined before starting on a voyage, some bird will not fail to say, "Don't start! there will be a storm," or else, "Go! you will make a most profitable venture."

EUELPIDES

I shall buy a trading-vessel and go to sea. I will not stay with you.

PITHETAERUS

You will discover treasures to them, which were buried in former times, for you know them. Do not all men say, "None knows where my treasure lies, unless perchance it be some bird." [18]

EUELPIDES

I shall sell my boat and buy a spade to unearth the vessels.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And how are we to give them health, which belongs to the gods?

PITHETAERUS

If they are happy, is not that the chief thing towards health? The miserable man is never well.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Old Age also dwells in Olympus. How will they get at it? Must they die in early youth?

PITHETAERUS

Why, the birds, by Zeus, will add three hundred years to their life.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

From whom will they take them?

PITHETAERUS

From whom? Why, from themselves. Don't you know the cawing crow lives five times as long as a man?

EUELPIDES

Ah! ah! these are far better kings for us than Zeus!

PITHETAERUS (*solemnly*)

Far better, are they not? And firstly, we shall not have to build them temples of hewn stone, closed with gates of gold; they will dwell amongst the bushes and in the thickets of green oak; the most venerated of birds will have no other temple than the foliage of the olive tree; we shall not go to Delphi or to Ammon to sacrifice; but standing erect in the midst of arbutus and wild olives and holding forth our hands filled with wheat and barley, we shall pray them to admit us to a share of the blessings they enjoy and shall at once obtain them for a few grains of wheat.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Old man, whom I detested, you are now to me the dearest of all; never shall I, if I can help it, fail to follow your advice.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Inspirited by your words, I threaten my rivals the gods, and I swear that if you march in alliance with me against the gods and are faithful to our just, loyal and sacred bond, we shall soon have shattered their sceptre.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We shall charge ourselves with the performance of everything that requires force; that which demands thought and deliberation shall be yours to supply.

EPOPS

By Zeus! it's no longer the time to delay and loiter like Nicias; let us act as promptly as possible. . . . In the first place, come, enter my nest built of brushwood and blades of straw, and tell me your names.

PITHETAERUS

That is soon done; my name is Pithetaerus, and his, Euelpides, of the deme Crioa.

EPOPS

Good! and good luck to you.

PITHETAERUS

We accept the omen.

EPOPS

Come in here.

PITHETAERUS

Very well, you are the one who must lead us and introduce us.

EPOPS

Come then.

(*He starts to fly away*)

PITHETAERUS (*stopping himself*)

Oh! my god! do come back here. Hi! tell us how we are to follow you. You can fly, but we cannot.

EPOPS

Well, well.

PITHETAERUS

Remember Aesop's fables. It is told there that the fox fared very badly, because he had made an alliance with the eagle.

EPOPS

Be at ease. You shall eat a certain root and wings will grow on your shoulders.

PITHETAERUS

Then let us enter. Xanthias and Manodorus, pick up our baggage.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hi! Epops! do you hear me?

EPOPS

What's the matter?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Take them off to dine well and call your mate, the melodious Procné, whose songs are worthy of the Muses; she will delight our leisure moments.

PITHETAERUS

Oh! I conjure you, accede to their wish; for this delightful bird will leave her rushes at the sound of your voice; for the sake of the gods, let her come here, so that we may contemplate the nightingale.

EPOPS

Let is be as you desire. Come forth, Procné, show yourself to these strangers.

(PROCNÉ *appears; she resembles a young flute-girl.*)

PITHETAERUS

Oh! great Zeus! what a beautiful little bird! what a dainty form! what brilliant plumage! Do you know how dearly I should like to get between her thighs?

EUELPIDES

She is dazzling all over with gold, like a young girl.[19] Oh! how I should like to kiss her!

PITHETAERUS

Why, wretched man, she has two little sharp points on her beak!

EUELPIDES

I would treat her like an egg, the shell of which we remove before eating it; I would take off her mask and then kiss her pretty face.

EPOPS

Let us go in.

PITHETAERUS

Lead the way, and may success attend us.

(EPOPS *goes into the thicket, followed by* PITHETAERUS *and* EUELPIDES.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Lovable golden bird, whom I cherish above all others, you, whom I associate with all my songs, nightingale, you have come, you have come, to show yourself to me and to charm me with your notes. Come, you, who play spring melodies upon the harmonious flute, lead off our anapests.

(*The* CHORUS *turns and faces the audience.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Weak mortals, chained to the earth, creatures of clay as frail as the foliage of the woods, you unfortunate race, whose life is but darkness, as unreal as a shadow, the illusion of a dream, hearken to us, who are immortal beings, ethereal, ever young and occupied with eternal thoughts, for we shall teach you about all celestial matters; you shall know thoroughly what is the nature of the birds, what the origin of the gods, of the rivers, of Erebus, and Chaos; thanks to us, even Prodicus will envy you your knowledge.

At the beginning there was only Chaos, Night, dark Erebus, and deep Tartarus. Earth, the air and heaven had no existence. Firstly, black-winged Night laid a germless egg in the bosom of the infinite deeps of Erebus, and from this, after the revolution of long ages, sprang the graceful Eros with his glittering golden wings, swift as the whirlwinds of the tempest. He mated in deep Tartarus with dark Chaos, winged like himself, and thus hatched forth our race, which was the first to see the light. That of the Immortals did not exist until Eros had brought together all the ingredients of the world, and from their marriage Heaven, Ocean, Earth and the imperishable race of blessed gods sprang into being. Thus our origin is very much older than that of the dwellers in Olympus. We are the offspring of Eros; there are a thousand proofs to show it. We have wings and we lend assistance to lovers. How many handsome youths, who had sworn to remain insensible, have opened their thighs because of our power and have yielded themselves to their lovers when almost at the end of their youth, being led away by the gift of a quail, a waterfowl, a goose, or a cock.

And what important services do not the birds render to mortals! First of all, they mark the seasons for them, springtime, winter, and autumn. Does the screaming crane migrate to Libya,—it warns the husbandman to sow, the pilot to take his ease beside his tiller hung up in his dwelling, and Orestes to weave a tunic, so that the rigorous cold may not drive him any more to strip other folk. When the kite reappears, he tells of the return of

spring and of the period when the fleece of the sheep must be clipped. Is the swallow in sight? All hasten to sell their warm tunic and to buy some light clothing. We are your Ammon, Delphi, Dodona, your Phoebus Apollo. Before undertaking anything, whether a business transaction, a marriage, or the purchase of food, you consult the birds by reading the omens, and you give this name of omen [20] to all signs that tell of the future. With you a word is an omen, you call a sneeze an omen, a meeting an omen, an unknown sound an omen, a slave or an ass an omen. Is it not clear that we are a prophetic Apollo to you? (*More and more rapidly from here on.*) If you recognize us as gods, we shall be your divining Muses, through us you will know the winds and the seasons, summer, winter, and the temperate months. We shall not withdraw ourselves to the highest clouds like Zeus, but shall be among you and shall give to you and to your children and the children of your children, health and wealth, long life, peace, youth, laughter, songs and feasts; in short, you will all be so well off, that you will be weary and cloyed with enjoyment.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, rustic Muse of such varied note, *tiotiotiotiotiotinx,* I sing with you in the groves and on the mountain tops, *tiotiotiotinx.* I poured forth sacred strains from my golden throat in honour of the god Pan, *tiotiotiotinx,* from the top of the thickly leaved ash, and my voice mingles with the mighty choirs who extol Cybelé on the mountain tops, *totototototototototototinx.* 'Tis to our concerts that Phrynichus comes to pillage like a bee the ambrosia of his songs, the sweetness of which so charms the ear, *tiotiotiotinx.*

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

If there is one of you spectators who wishes to spend the rest of his life quietly among the birds, let him come to us. All that is disgraceful and forbidden by law on earth is on the contrary honourable among us, the birds. For instance, among you it's a crime to beat your father, but with us it's an estimable deed; it's considered fine to run straight at your father and hit him, saying, "Come, lift your spur if you want to fight." The runaway slave, whom you brand, is only a spotted francolin with us. Are you Phrygian like Spintharus? Among us you would be the Phrygian bird, the goldfinch, of the race of Philemon. Are you a slave and a Carian like Execestides? Among us you can create yourself forefathers; [21] you can always find relations. Does the son of Pisias want to betray the gates of the city to the foe? Let him become a partridge, the fitting offspring of his father; among us there is no shame in escaping as cleverly as a partridge.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

So the swans on the banks of the Hebrus, *tiotiotiotiotiotinx,* mingle their voices to serenade Apollo, *tiotiotiotinx,* flapping their wings the while, *tiotiotiotinx;* their notes reach beyond the clouds of heaven; they startle the various tribes of the beasts; a windless sky calms the waves, *totototototototototinx;* all Olympus resounds, and astonishment seizes its rulers; the Olympian graces and Muses cry aloud the strain, *tiotiotiotinx.*

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

There is nothing more useful nor more pleasant than to have wings. To begin with, just let us suppose a spectator to be dying with hunger and to be weary of the choruses of the tragic poets; if he were winged, he would fly off, go home to dine and come back with his stomach filled. Some Patroclides, needing to take a crap, would not have to spill it out on his cloak, but could fly off, satisfy his requirements, let a few farts and, having recovered his breath, return. If one of you, it matters not who, had adulterous relations and saw the husband of his mistress in the seats of the senators, he might stretch his wings, fly to her, and, having laid her, resume his place. Is it not the most priceless gift of all, to be winged? Look at Diitrephes! His wings were only wicker-work ones, and yet he got himself chosen Phylarch and then Hipparch; from being nobody, he has risen to be famous; he's now the finest gilded cock of his tribe.

(PITHETAERUS *and* EUELPIDES *return; they now have wings.*)

PITHETAERUS

Halloa! What's this? By Zeus! I never saw anything so funny in all my life.

EUELPIDES

What makes you laugh?

PITHETAERUS

Your little wings. D'you know what you look like? Like a goose painted by some dauber.

EUELPIDES

And you look like a close-shaven blackbird.

PITHETAERUS

We ourselves asked for this transformation, and, as Aeschylus has it, "These are no borrowed feathers, but truly our own."

EPOPS

Come now, what must be done?

PITHETAERUS

First give our city a great and famous name, then sacrifice to the gods.

EUELPIDES

I think so too.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let's see. What shall our city be called?

PITHETAERUS

Will you have a high-sounding Laconian name? Shall we call it Sparta?

EUELPIDES

What! call my town Sparta? Why, I would not use *esparto* for my bed,[22] even though I had nothing but bands of rushes.

PITHETAERUS

Well then, what name can you suggest?

EUELPIDES

Some name borrowed from the clouds, from these lofty regions in which we dwell—in short, some well-known name.

PITHETAERUS

Do you like Nephelococcygia?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! capital! truly that's a brilliant thought!

EUELPIDES

Is it in Nephelococcygia that all the wealth of Theogenes and most of Aeschines' is?

PITHETAERUS

No, it's rather the plain of Phlegra, where the gods withered the pride of the sons of the Earth with their shafts.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! what a splendid city! But what god shall be its patron? for whom shall we weave the peplus?

EUELPIDES

Why not choose Athené Polias?

PITHETAERUS

Oh! what a well-ordered town it would be to have a female deity armed from head to foot, while Clisthenes was spinning!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Who then shall guard the Pelargicon?

PITHETAERUS

A bird.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

One of us? What kind of bird?

PITHETAERUS

A bird of Persian strain, who is everywhere proclaimed to be the bravest of all, a true chick of Ares.

EUELPIDES

Oh! noble chick!

PITHETAERUS

Because he is a god well suited to live on the rocks. Come! into the air with you to help the workers who are building the wall; carry up rubble, strip yourself to mix the mortar, take up the hod, tumble down the ladder, if you like, post sentinels, keep the fire smouldering beneath the ashes, go round the walls, bell in hand, and go to sleep up there yourself; then despatch two heralds, one to the gods above, the other to mankind on earth and come back here.

EUELPIDES

As for yourself, remain here, and may the plague take you for a troublesome fellow!

(*He departs.*)

PITHETAERUS

Go, friend, go where I send you, for without you my orders cannot be obeyed. For myself, I want to sacrifice to the new god, and I am going to summon the priest who must preside at the ceremony. Slaves! slaves! bring forward the basket and the lustral water.

CHORUS (*singing*)

I do as you do, and I wish as you wish, and I implore you to address powerful and solemn prayers to the gods, and in addition to immolate a sheep as a token of our gratitude. Let us sing the Pythian chant in honour of the god, and let Chaeris accompany our voices.

PITHETAERUS (*to the flute-player*)

Enough! but, by Heracles! what is this? Great gods! I have seen many prodigious things, but I never saw a muzzled raven.[23] (*The* PRIEST *arrives.*) Priest! it's high time! Sacrifice to the new gods.

PRIEST

I begin, but where is the man with the basket? [24] Pray to the Hestia of the birds, to the kite, who presides over the hearth, and to all the god and goddess-birds who dwell in Olympus . . .

PITHETAERUS

Oh! Hawk, the sacred guardian of Sunium, oh, god of the storks!

PRIEST

. . . to the swan of Delos, to Leto the mother of the quails, and to Artemis, the goldfinch . . .

PITHETAERUS

It's no longer Artemis Colaenis, but Artemis the goldfinch.

PRIEST

. . . to Bacchus, the finch and Cybelé, the ostrich and mother of the gods and mankind . . .

PITHETAERUS

Oh! sovereign ostrich Cybelé, mother of Cleocritus!

PRIEST

. . . to grant health and safety to the Nephelococcygians as well as to the dwellers in Chios . . .

PITHETAERUS

The dwellers in Chios! Ah! I am delighted they should be thus mentioned on all occasions.

PRIEST

. . . to the heroes, the birds, to the sons of heroes, to the porphyrion, the pelican, the spoon-bill, the redbreast, the grouse, the peacock, the horned-owl, the teal, the bittern, the heron, the stormy petrel, the fig-pecker, the titmouse . . .

PITHETAERUS

Stop! stop! you drive me crazy with your endless list. Why, wretch, to what sacred feast are you inviting the vultures and the sea-eagles? Don't you see that a single kite could easily carry off the lot at once? Begone, you and your fillets and all; I shall know how to complete the sacrifice by myself.

(*The* PRIEST *departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

It is imperative that I sing another sacred chant for the rite of the lustral water, and that I invoke the immortals, or at least one of them, provided always that you have some suitable food to offer him; from what I see here, in the shape of gifts, there is naught whatever but horn and hair.

PITHETAERUS

Let us address our sacrifices and our prayers to the winged gods.

(*A* POET *enters.*)

POET

Oh, Muse! celebrate happy Nephelococcygia in your hymns.

PITHETAERUS

What have we here? Where did you come from, tell me? Who are you?

POET

I am he whose language is sweeter than honey, the zealous slave of the Muses, as Homer has it.

PITHETAERUS

You a slave! and yet you wear your hair long?

POET

No, but the fact is all we poets are the assiduous slaves of the Muses, according to Homer.

PITHETAERUS

In truth your little cloak is quite holy too through zeal! But, poet, what ill wind drove you here?

POET

I have composed verses in honour of your Nephelococcygia, a host of splendid dithyrambs and parthenia worthy of Simonides himself.

PITHETAERUS

And when did you compose them? How long since?

POET

Oh! 'tis long, aye, very long, that I have sung in honour of this city.

PITHETAERUS

But I am only celebrating its foundation with this sacrifice; I have only just named it, as is done with little babies.

POET

"Just as the chargers fly with the speed of the wind, so does the voice of the Muses take its flight. Oh! thou noble founder of the town of Aetna, thou, whose name recalls the holy sacrifices, make us such gift as thy generous heart shall suggest."

(*He puts out his hand.*)

PITHETAERUS

He will drive us silly if we do not get rid of him by some present. (*To the* PRIEST'S *acolyte*) Here! you, who have a fur as well as your tunic, take it off and give it to this clever poet. Come, take this fur; you look to me to be shivering with cold.

POET

My Muse will gladly accept this gift; but engrave these verses of Pindar's on your mind.

PITHETAERUS

Oh! what a pest! It's impossible then to get rid of him!

POET

"Straton wanders among the Scythian nomads, but has no linen garment. He is sad at only wearing an animal's pelt and no tunic." Do you get what I mean?

PITHETAERUS

I understand that you want me to offer you a tunic. Hi! you (*to the acolyte*), take off yours; we must help the poet. . . . Come, you, take it and get out.

POET

I am going, and these are the verses that I address to this city: "Phoebus of the golden throne, celebrate this shivery, freezing city; I have travelled through fruitful and snow-covered plains. Tralalá! Tralalá!"

(*He departs*)

PITHETAERUS

What are you chanting us about frosts? Thanks to the tunic, you no longer fear them. Ah! by Zeus! I could not have believed this cursed fellow could so soon have learnt the way to our city. (*To a slave*) Come, take the lustral water and circle the altar. Let all keep silence!

(*An* ORACLE-MONGER *enters.*)

ORACLE-MONGER

Let not the goat be sacrificed.

PITHETAERUS

Who are you?

ORACLE-MONGER

Who am I? An oracle-monger.

PITHETAERUS

Get out!

ORACLE-MONGER

Wretched man, insult not sacred things. For there is an oracle of Bacis, which exactly applies to Nephelococcygia.

PITHETAERUS

Why did you not reveal it to me before I founded my city?

ORACLE-MONGER

The divine spirit was against it.

PITHETAERUS

Well, I suppose there's nothing to do but hear the terms of the oracle.

ORACLE-MONGER

"But when the wolves and the white crows shall dwell together between Corinth and Sicyon . . ."

PITHETAERUS

But how do the Corinthians concern me?

ORACLE-MONGER

It is the regions of the air that Bacis indicates in this manner "They must first sacrifice a white-fleeced goat to Pandora, and give the prophet who first reveals my words a good cloak and new sandals."

PITHETAERUS

Does it say sandals there?

ORACLE-MONGER

Look at the book. "And besides this a goblet of wine and a good share of the entrails of the victim."

PITHETAERUS

Of the entrails—does it say that?

ORACLE-MONGER

Look at the book. "If you do as I command, divine youth, you shall be an eagle among the clouds; if not, you shall be neither turtle-dove, nor eagle, nor woodpecker."

PITHETAERUS

Does it say all that?

ORACLE-MONGER

Look at the book.

PITHETAERUS

This oracle in no sort of way resembles the one Apollo dictated to me: "If an impostor comes without invitation to annoy you during the sacrifice and to demand a share of the victim, apply a stout stick to his ribs."

ORACLE-MONGER

You are drivelling.

PITHETAERUS

Look at the book. "And don't spare him, were he an eagle from out of the clouds, were it Lampon himself or the great Diopithes."

ORACLE-MONGER

Does it say that?

PITHETAERUS

Look at the book and go and hang yourself.

ORACLE-MONGER

Oh! unfortunate wretch that I am.

(*He departs.*)

PITHETAERUS

Away with you, and take your prophecies elsewhere.

(*Enter* METON, *with surveying instruments.*)

METON

I have come to you . . .

PITHETAERUS (*interrupting*)

Yet another pest! What have you come to do? What's your plan? What's the purpose of your journey? Why these splendid buskins?

METON

I want to survey the plains of the air for you and to parcel them into lots.

PITHETAERUS

In the name of the gods, who are you?

METON

Who am I? Meton, known throughout Greece and at Colonus.

PITHETAERUS

What are these things?

METON

Tools for measuring the air. In truth, the spaces in the air have precisely the form of a furnace. With this bent ruler I draw a line from top to bottom; from one of its points I describe a circle with the compass. Do you understand?

PITHETAERUS

Not in the least.

METON

With the straight ruler I set to work to inscribe a square within this circle; in its centre will be the market-place, into which all the straight streets will lead, converging to this centre like a star, which, although only orbicular, sends forth its rays in a straight line from all sides.

PITHETAERUS

A regular Thales! Meton . . .

METON

What d'you want with me?

PITHETAERUS

I want to give you a proof of my friendship. Use your legs.

METON

Why, what have I to fear?

PITHETAERUS

It's the same here as in Sparta. Strangers are driven away, and blows rain down as thick as hail.

METON

Is there sedition in your city?

PITHETAERUS

No, certainly not.

METON

What's wrong then?

PITHETAERUS

We are agreed to sweep all quacks and impostors far from our borders.

METON

Then I'll be going.

PITHETAERUS

I'm afraid it's too late. The thunder growls already.

(*He beats him.*)

METON

Oh, woe! oh, woe!

PITHETAERUS

I warned you. Now, be off, and do your surveying somewhere else.

(METON *takes to his heels. He is no sooner gone than an* INSPECTOR *arrives.*)

INSPECTOR

Where are the Proxeni?

PITHETAERUS

Who is this Sardanapalus?

INSPECTOR

I have been appointed by lot to come to Nephelococcygia as inspector.

PITHETAERUS

An inspector! and who sends you here, you rascal?

INSPECTOR

A decree of Teleas.

PITHETAERUS

Will you just pocket your salary, do nothing, and get out?

INSPECTOR

Indeed I will; I am urgently needed to be at Athens to attend the Assembly; for I am charged with the interests of Pharnaces.

PITHETAERUS

Take it then, and get on your way. This is your salary.

(*He beats him.*)

INSPECTOR

What does this mean?

PITHETAERUS

This is the assembly where you have to defend Pharnaces.

INSPECTOR

You shall testify that they dare to strike me, the inspector.

PITHETAERUS

Are you not going to get out with your urns? [26] It's not to be believed; they send us inspectors before we have so much as paid sacrifice to the gods.

(*The* INSPECTOR *goes into hiding. A* DEALER IN DECREES *arrives.*)

DEALER IN DECREES (*reading*)

"If the Nephelococcygian does wrong to the Athenian . . ."

PITHETAERUS

What trouble now? What book is that?

DEALER IN DECREES

I am a dealer in decrees, and I have come here to sell you the new laws.

PITHETAERUS

Which?

DEALER IN DECREES

"The Nephelococcygians shall adopt the same weights, measures and decrees as the Olophyxians."

PITHETAERUS

And you shall soon be imitating the Ototyxians.

(*He beats him.*)

DEALER IN DECREES

Ow! what are you doing?

PITHETAERUS

Now will you get out of here with your decrees? For I am going to let *you* see some severe ones.

(*The* DEALER IN DECREES *departs; the* INSPECTOR *comes out of hiding.*)

INSPECTOR (*returning*)

I summon Pithetaerus for outrage for the month of Munychion.

PITHETAERUS

Ha! my friend! are you still here?

(*The* DEALER IN DECREES *also returns.*)

DEALER IN DECREES

"Should anyone drive away the magistrates and not receive them, according to the decree duly posted . . ."

PITHETAERUS

What! rascal! you are back too?

(*He rushes at him.*)

INSPECTOR

Woe to you! I'll have you condemned to a fine of ten thousand drachmae.

PITHETAERUS

And I'll smash your urns.

INSPECTOR

Do you recall that evening when you crapped on the column where the decrees are posted?

PITHETAERUS

Here! here! let him be seized. (*The* INSPECTOR *runs off.*) Why, don't you want to stay any longer? But let us get indoors as quick as possible; we will sacrifice the goat inside.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Henceforth it is to me that mortals must address their sacrifices and their prayers. Nothing escapes my sight nor my might. My glance embraces the universe, I preserve the fruit in the flower by destroying the thousand kinds of voracious insects the soil produces, which attack the trees and feed on the germ when it has scarcely formed in the calyx; I destroy those who ravage the balmy terrace gardens like a deadly plague; all these gnawing crawling creatures perish beneath the lash of my wing.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

I hear it proclaimed everywhere: "A talent for him who shall kill Diagoras of Melos, and a talent for him who destroys one of the dead tyrants." [27] We likewise wish to make our proclamation: "A talent to him among you who shall kill Philocrates, the Struthian; four, if he brings him to us alive. For this Philocrates skewers the finches together and sells them at the rate of an obolus for seven. He tortures the thrushes by blowing them out, so that they may look bigger, sticks their own feathers into the nostrils of blackbirds, and collects pigeons, which he shuts up and forces them, fastened in a net, to decoy others." That is what we wish to proclaim. And if anyone is keeping birds shut up in his yard, let him hasten to let them loose; those who disobey shall be seized by the birds and we shall put them in chains, so that in their turn they may decoy other men.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Happy indeed is the race of winged birds who need no cloak in winter! Neither do I fear the relentless rays of the fiery dog-days; when the divine grasshopper, intoxicated with the sunlight, as noon is burning the ground, is breaking out into shrill melody; my home is beneath the foliage in the flowery meadows. I winter in deep caverns, where I frolic with the mountain nymphs, while in spring I despoil the gardens of the Graces and gather the white, virgin berry on the myrtle bushes.

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

I want now to speak to the judges about the prize they are going to award; if they are favourable to us, we will load them with benefits far greater than those Paris received. Firstly, the owls of Laurium, which every judge desires above all things, shall never be wanting to you; you shall see them homing with you, building their nests in your money-bags and laying coins. Besides, you shall be housed like the gods, for we shall erect gables [28] over your dwellings; if you hold some public post and want to do a little pilfering, we will give you the sharp claws of a hawk. Are you dining in town, we will provide you with stomachs as capacious as a bird's crop. But, if your award is against us, don't fail to have metal covers fashioned for yourselves, like those they place over statues; else, look out! for the day you wear a white tunic all the birds will soil it with their droppings.

PITHETAERUS

Birds! the sacrifice is propitious. But I see no messenger coming from the wall to tell us what is happening. Ah! here comes one running himself out of breath as though he were in the Olympic stadium.

MESSENGER (*running back and forth*)

Where, where, where is he? Where, where, where is he? Where, where, where is he? Where is Pithetaerus, our leader?

PITHETAERUS

Here am I.

MESSENGER

The wall is finished.

PITHETAERUS

That's good news.

MESSENGER

It's a most beautiful, a most magnificent work of art. The wall is so broad that Proxenides, the Braggartian, and Theogenes could pass each other in their chariots, even if they were drawn by steeds as big as the Trojan horse.

PITHETAERUS

That's fine!

MESSENGER

Its length is one hundred stadia; I measured it myself.

PITHETAERUS

A decent length, by Posidon! And who built such a wall?

MESSENGER

Birds—birds only; they had neither Egyptian brickmaker, nor stonemason, nor carpenter; the birds did it all themselves; I could hardly believe my eyes. Thirty thousand cranes came from Libya with a supply of stones, intended for the foundations. The water-rails chiselled them with their beaks. Ten thousand storks were busy making bricks; plovers and other water fowl carried water into the air.

PITHETAERUS

And who carried the mortar?

MESSENGER

Herons, in hods.

PITHETAERUS

But how could they put the mortar into the hods?

MESSENGER

Oh! it was a truly clever invention; the geese used their feet like spades; they buried them in the pile of mortar and then emptied them into the hods.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! to what use cannot feet be put? [29]

MESSENGER

You should have seen how eagerly the ducks carried bricks. To complete the tale, the swallows came flying to the work, their beaks full of mortar and their trowels on their backs, just the way little children are carried.

PITHETAERUS

Who would want paid servants after this? But tell me, who did the woodwork?

MESSENGER

Birds again, and clever carpenters too, the pelicans, for they squared up the gates with their beaks in such a fashion that one would have thought they were using axes; the noise was just like a dockyard. Now the whole wall is tight everywhere, securely bolted and well guarded; it is patrolled, bell in hand; the sentinels stand everywhere and beacons burn on the towers. But I must run off to clean myself; the rest is your business.

(*He departs.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*to* PITHETAERUS)

Well! what do you say to it? Are you not astonished at the wall being completed so quickly?

PITHETAERUS

By the gods, yes, and with good reason. It's really not to be believed. But here comes another messenger from the wall to bring us some further news! What a fighting look he has!

SECOND MESSENGER (*rushing in*)

Alas! alas! alas! alas! alas! alas!

PITHETAERUS

What's the matter?

SECOND MESSENGER

A horrible outrage has occurred; a god sent by Zeus has passed through our gates and has penetrated the realms of the air without the knowledge of the jays, who are on guard in the daytime.

PITHETAERUS

It's a terrible and criminal deed. What god was it?

SECOND MESSENGER

We don't know that. All we know is, that he has got wings.

PITHETAERUS

Why were not patrolmen sent against him at once?

SECOND MESSENGER

We have despatched thirty thousand hawks of the legion of Mounted Archers. All the hook-clawed birds are moving against him, the kestrel, the buzzard, the vulture, the great-horned owl; they cleave the air so that

it resounds with the flapping of their wings; they are looking everywhere for the god, who cannot be far away; indeed, if I mistake not, he is coming from yonder side.

PITHETAERUS

To arms, all, with slings and bows! This way, all our soldiers; shoot and strike! Some one give me a sling!

CHORUS (*singing*)

War, a terrible war is breaking out between us and the gods! Come, let each one guard Air, the son of Erebus, in which the clouds float. Take care no immortal enters it without your knowledge.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Scan all sides with your glance. Hark! methinks I can hear the rustle of the swift wings of a god from heaven.

(*The Machine brings in* IRIS, *in the form of a young girl.*)

PITHETAERUS

Hi! you woman! where, where, where are you flying to? Halt, don't stir! keep motionless! not a beat of your wing! (*She pauses in her flight.*) Who are you and from what country? You must say whence you come.

IRIS

I come from the abode of the Olympian gods.

PITHETAERUS

What's your name, ship or head-dress? [30]

IRIS

I am swift Iris.

PITHETAERUS

Paralus or Salaminia?

IRIS

What do you mean?

PITHETAERUS

Let a buzzard rush at her and seize her.[31]

IRIS

Seize me? But what do all these insults mean?

PITHETAERUS

Woe to you!

IRIS

I do not understand it.

PITHETAERUS

By which gate did you pass through the wall, wretched woman?

IRIS

By which *gate*? Why, great gods, I don't know.

PITHETAERUS

You hear how she holds us in derision. Did you present yourself to the officers in command of the jays? You don't answer. Have you a permit, bearing the seal of the storks?

IRIS

Am I dreaming?

PITHETAERUS

Did you get one?

IRIS

Are you mad?

PITHETAERUS

No head-bird gave you a safe-conduct?

IRIS

A safe-conduct to *me*. You poor fool!

PITHETAERUS

Ah! and so you slipped into this city on the sly and into these realms of air-land that don't belong to you.

IRIS

And what other roads can the gods travel?

PITHETAERUS

By Zeus! I know nothing about that, not I. But they won't pass this way. And you still dare to complain? Why, if you were treated according to your deserts, no Iris would ever have more justly suffered death.

IRIS

I am immortal.

PITHETAERUS

You would have died nevertheless.—Oh! that would be truly intolerable! What! should the universe obey us and the gods alone continue

their insolence and not understand that they must submit to the law of the strongest in their due turn? But tell me, where are you flying to?

IRIS

I? The messenger of Zeus to mankind, I am going to tell them to sacrifice sheep and oxen on the altars and to fill their streets with the rich smoke of burning fat.

PITHETAERUS

Of which gods are you speaking?

IRIS

Of which? Why, of ourselves, the gods of heaven.

PITHETAERUS

You, gods?

IRIS

Are there others then?

PITHETAERUS

Men now adore the birds as gods, and it's to them, by Zeus, that they must offer sacrifices, and not to Zeus at all!

IRIS (*in tragic style*)

Oh! fool! fool! Rouse not the wrath of the gods, for it is terrible indeed. Armed with the brand of Zeus, Justice would annihilate your race; the lightning would strike you as it did Licymnius and consume both your body and the porticos of your palace.

PITHETAERUS

Here! that's enough tall talk. Just you listen and keep quiet! Do you take me for a Lydian or a Phrygian and think to frighten me with your big words? Know, that if Zeus worries me again, I shall go at the head of my eagles, who are armed with lightning, and reduce his dwelling and that of Amphion to cinders. I shall send more than six hundred porphyrions clothed in leopards' skins up to heaven against him; and formerly a single Porphyrion gave him enough to do. As for you, his messenger, if you annoy me, I shall begin by getting between your thighs, and even though you are Iris, you will be surprised at the erection the old man can produce; it's three times as good as the ram on a ship's prow!

IRIS

May you perish, you wretch, you and your infamous words!

PITHETAERUS

Won't you get out of here quickly? Come, stretch your wings or look out for squalls!

IRIS

If my father does not punish you for your insults . . .

(*The Machine takes* IRIS *away.*)

PITHETAERUS

Ha! . . . but just you be off elsewhere to roast younger folk than us with your lightning.

CHORUS (*singing*)

We forbid the gods, the sons of Zeus, to pass through our city and the mortals to send them the smoke of their sacrifices by this road.

PITHETAERUS

It's odd that the messenger we sent to the mortals has never returned.

(*The* HERALD *enters, wearing a golden garland on his head.*)

HERALD

Oh! blessed Pithetaerus, very wise, very illustrious, very gracious, thrice happy, very . . . Come, prompt me, somebody, do

PITHETAERUS

Get to your story!

HERALD

All peoples are filled with admiration for your wisdom, and they award you this golden crown.

PITHETAERUS

I accept it. But tell me, why do the people admire me?

HERALD

Oh you, who have founded so illustrious a city in the air, you know not in what esteem men hold you and how many there are who burn with desire to dwell in it. Before your city was built, all men had a mania for Sparta; long hair and fasting were held in honour, men went dirty like Socrates and carried staves. Now all is changed. Firstly, as soon as it's dawn, they all spring out of bed together to go and seek their food, the same as you do; then they fly off towards the notices and finally devour the decrees. The bird-madness is so clear that many actually bear the names of birds. There is a halting victualler, who styles himself the partridge; Menippus calls himself the swallow; Opuntius the one-eyed crow;

Philocles the lark; Theogenes the fox-goose; Lycurgus the ibis; Chaerephon the bat; Syracosius the magpie; Midias the quail; indeed he looks like a quail that has been hit hard on the head. Out of love for the birds they repeat all the songs which concern the swallow, the teal, the goose or the pigeon; in each verse you see wings, or at all events a few feathers. This is what is happening down there. Finally, there are more than ten thousand folk who are coming here from earth to ask you for feathers and hooked claws; so, mind you supply yourself with wings for the immigrants.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! by Zeus, there's no time for idling. (*To some slaves*) Go as quick as possible and fill every hamper, every basket you can find with wings. Manes will bring them to me outside the walls, where I will welcome those who present themselves.

CHORUS (*singing*)

This town will soon be inhabited by a crowd of men. Fortune favours us alone and thus they have fallen in love with our city.

PITHETAERUS (*to the slave* MANES, *who brings in a basket full of wings*)

Come, hurry up and bring them along.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Will not man find here everything that can please him—wisdom, love, the divine Graces, the sweet face of gentle peace?

PITHETAERUS (*as* MANES *comes in with another basket*)

Oh! you lazy servant! won't you hurry yourself?

CHORUS (*singing*)

Let a basket of wings be brought speedily. Come, beat him as I do, and put some life into him; he is as lazy as an ass.

PITHETAERUS

Aye, Manes is a great craven.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Begin by putting this heap of wings in order; divide them in three parts according to the birds from whom they came; the singing, the prophetic and the aquatic birds; then you must take care to distribute them to the men according to their character.

PITHETAERUS (*to* MANES, *who is bringing in another basket*)

Oh! by the kestrels! I can keep my hands off you no longer; you are too slow and lazy altogether.

(*He hits* MANES, *who runs away. A young* PARRICIDE *enters.*)

PARRICIDE (*singing*)

Oh! might I but become an eagle, who soars in the skies! Oh! might I fly above the azure waves of the barren sea!

PITHETAERUS

Ha! it would seem the news was true; I hear someone coming who talks of wings.

PARRICIDE

Nothing is more charming than to fly; I am bird-mad and fly towards you, for I want to live with you and to obey your laws.

PITHETAERUS

Which laws? The birds have many laws.

PARRICIDE

All of them; but the one that pleases me most is that among the birds it is considered a fine thing to peck and strangle one's father.

PITHETAERUS

Yes, by Zeus! according to us, he who dares to strike his father, while still a chick, is a brave fellow.

PARRICIDE

And therefore I want to dwell here, for I want to strangle my father and inherit his wealth.

PITHETAERUS

But we have also an ancient law written in the code of the storks, which runs thus, "When the stork father has reared his young and has taught them to fly, the young must in their turn support the father."

PARRICIDE (*petulantly*)

It's hardly worth while coming all this distance to be compelled to keep my father!

PITHETAERUS

No, no, young friend, since you have come to us with such willingness, I am going to give you these black wings, as though you were an orphan bird; furthermore, some good advice, that I received myself in infancy. Don't strike your father, but take these wings in one hand and these spurs in the other; imagine you have a cock's crest on your head and go and mount guard and fight; live on your pay and respect your father's life. You're a gallant fellow! Very well, then! Fly to Thrace and fight.

PARRICIDE

By Bacchus! You're right; I will follow your counsel.

PITHETAERUS

It's acting wisely, by Zeus..

(*The* PARRICIDE *departs, and the dithyrambic poet* CINESIAS *arrives.*)

CINESIAS (*singing*)

"On my light pinions I soar off to Olympus; in its capricious flight my Muse flutters along the thousand paths of poetry in turn . . ."

PITHETAERUS

This is a fellow will need a whole shipload of wings.

CINESIAS (*singing*)

". . . and being fearless and vigorous, it is seeking fresh outlet."

PITHETAERUS

Welcome, Cinesias, you lime-wood man! Why have you come here twisting your game leg in circles?

CINESIAS (*singing*)

"I want to become a bird, a tuneful nightingale."

PITHETAERUS

Enough of that sort of ditty. Tell me what you want.

CINESIAS

Give me wings and I will fly into the topmost airs to gather fresh songs in the clouds, in the midst of the vapours and the fleecy snow.

PITHETAERUS

Gather songs in the clouds?

CINESIAS

'Tis on them the whole of our latter-day art depends. The most brilliant dithyrambs are those that flap their wings in empty space and are clothed in mist and dense obscurity. To appreciate this, just listen.

PITHETAERUS

Oh! no, no, no!

CINESIAS

By Hermes! but indeed you shall. (*He sings.*) "I shall travel through thine ethereal empire like a winged bird, who cleaveth space with his long neck . . ."

PITHETAERUS

Stop! Way enough!

CINESIAS

". . . as I soar over the seas, carried by the breath of the winds . . ."

PITHETAERUS

By Zeus! I'll cut your breath short.

(*He picks up a pair of wings and begins trying to stop* CINESIAS' *mouth with them.*)

CINESIAS (*running away*)

". . . now rushing along the tracks of Notus, now nearing Boreas across the infinite wastes of the ether." Ah! old man, that's a pretty and clever idea truly!

PITHETAERUS

What! are you not delighted to be cleaving the air?

CINESIAS

To treat a dithyrambic poet, for whom the tribes dispute with each other, in this style! [32]

PITHETAERUS

Will you stay with us and form a chorus of winged birds as slender as Leotrophides for the Cecropid tribe?

CINESIAS

You are making game of me, that's clear; but know that I shall never leave you in peace if I do not have wings wherewith to traverse the air.

(CINESIAS *departs and an* INFORMER *arrives.*)

INFORMER

What are these birds with downy feathers, who look so pitiable to me? Tell me, oh swallow with the long dappled wings.

PITHETAERUS

Oh! it's a regular invasion that threatens us. Here comes another one, humming along.

INFORMER

Swallow with the long dappled wings, once more I summon you.

PITHETAERUS

It's his cloak I believe he's addressing; it stands in great need of the swallows' return.

INFORMER

Where is he who gives out wings to all comers?

PITHETAERUS

Here I am, but you must tell me for what purpose you want them.

INFORMER

Ask no questions. I want wings, and wings I must have.

PITHETAERUS

Do you want to fly straight to Pellené?

INFORMER

I? Why, I am an accuser of the islands, an informer . . .

PITHETAERUS

A fine trade, truly!

INFORMER

. . . a hatcher of lawsuits. Hence I have great need of wings to prowl round the cities and drag them before justice.

PITHETAERUS

Would you do this better if you had wings?

INFORMER

No, but I should no longer fear the pirates, I should return with the cranes, loaded with a supply of lawsuits by way of ballast.

PITHETAERUS

So it seems, despite all your youthful vigour, you make it your trade to denounce strangers?

INFORMER

Well, and why not? I don't know how to dig.

PITHETAERUS

But, by Zeus! there are honest ways of gaining a living at your age without all this infamous trickery.

INFORMER

My friend, I am asking you for wings, not for words.

PITHETAERUS

It's just my words that gives you wings.

INFORMER

And how can you give a man wings with your words?

PITHETAERUS

They all start this way.

INFORMER

How?

PITHETAERUS

Have you not often heard the father say to young men in the barbers' shops, "It's astonishing how Diitrephes' advice has made my son fly to horse-riding."—"Mine," says another, "has flown towards tragic poetry on the wings of his imagination."

INFORMER

So that words give wings?

PITHETAERUS

Undoubtedly; words give wings to the mind and make a man soar to heaven. Thus I hope that my wise words will give you wings to fly to some less degrading trade.

INFORMER

But I do not want to.

PITHETAERUS

What do you reckon on doing then?

INFORMER

I won't belie my breeding; from generation to generation we have lived by informing. Quick, therefore, give me quickly some light, swift hawk or kestrel wings, so that I may summon the islanders, sustain the accusation here, and haste back there again on flying pinions.

PITHETAERUS

I see. In this way the stranger will be condemned even before he appears.

INFORMER

That's just it.

PITHETAERUS

And while he is on his way here by sea, you will be flying to the islands to despoil him of his property.

INFORMER

You've hit it, precisely; I must whirl hither and thither like a perfect humming-top.

PITHETAERUS

I catch the idea. Wait, I've got some fine Corcyraean wings. How do you like them?

INFORMER

Oh! woe is me! Why, it's a whip!

PITHETAERUS

No, no; these are the wings, I tell you, that make the top spin.

INFORMER (*as* PITHETAERUS *lashes him*)

Oh! oh! oh!

PITHETAERUS

Take your flight, clear off, you miserable cur, or you will soon see what comes of quibbling and lying. (*The* INFORMER *flees. To his slaves*) Come, let us gather up our wings and withdraw.

(*The baskets are taken away.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

In my ethereal flights I have seen many things new and strange and wondrous beyond belief. There is a tree called Cleonymus belonging to an unknown species; it has no heart, is good for nothing and is as tall as it is cowardly. In springtime it shoots forth calumnies instead of buds and in autumn it strews the ground with bucklers in place of leaves.

Far away in the regions of darkness, where no ray of light ever enters, there is a country, where men sit at the table of the heroes and dwell with them always—except in the evening. Should any mortal meet the hero Orestes at night, he would soon be stripped and covered with blows from head to foot.

(PROMETHEUS *enters, masked to conceal his identity.*)

PROMETHEUS

Ah! by the gods! if only Zeus does not espy me! Where is Pithetaerus?

PITHETAERUS

Ha! what is this? A masked man!

PROMETHEUS

Can you see any god behind me?

PITHETAERUS

No, none. But who are you, pray?

PROMETHEUS

What's the time, please?

PITHETAERUS

The time? Why, it's past noon. Who are you?

PROMETHEUS

Is it the fall of day? Is it no later than that?

PITHETAERUS

This is getting dull!

PROMETHEUS

What is Zeus doing? Is he dispersing the clouds or gathering them?

PITHETAERUS

Watch out for yourself!

PROMETHEUS

Come, I will raise my mask.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! my dear Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS

Sh! Sh! speak lower!

PITHETAERUS

Why, what's the matter, Prometheus?

PROMETHEUS

Sh! sh! Don't call me by my name; you will be my ruin, if Zeus should see me here. But, if you want me to tell you how things are going in heaven, take this umbrella and shield me, so that the gods don't see me.

PITHETAERUS

I can recognize Prometheus in this cunning trick. Come, quick then, and fear nothing; speak on.

PROMETHEUS

Then listen.

PITHETAERUS

I am listening, proceed!

PROMETHEUS

Zeus is done for.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! and since when, pray?

PROMETHEUS

Since you founded this city in the air. There is not a man who now sacrifices to the gods; the smoke of the victims no longer reaches us. Not

the smallest offering comes! We fast as though it were the festival of Demeter. The barbarian gods, who are dying of hunger, are bawling like Illyrians and threaten to make an armed descent upon Zeus, if he does not open markets where joints of the victims are sold.

PITHETAERUS

What! there are other gods besides you, barbarian gods who dwell above Olympus?

PROMETHEUS

If there were no barbarian gods, who would be the patron of Execestides?

PITHETAERUS

And what is the name of these gods?

PROMETHEUS

Their name? Why, the Triballi.

PITHETAERUS

Ah, indeed! 'tis from that no doubt that we derive the word 'tribulation.' [33]

PROMETHEUS

Most likely. But one thing I can tell you for certain, namely, that Zeus and the celestial Triballi are going to send deputies here to sue for peace. Now don't you treat with them, unless Zeus restores the sceptre to the birds and gives you Basileia in marriage.

PITHETAERUS

Who is this Basileia?

PROMETHEUS

A very fine young damsel, who makes the lightning for Zeus; all things come from her, wisdom, good laws, virtue, the fleet, calumnies, the public paymaster and the triobolus.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! then she is a sort of general manageress to the god.

PROMETHEUS

Yes, precisely. If he gives you her for your wife, yours will be the almighty power. That is what I have come to tell you; for you know my constant and habitual goodwill towards men.

PITHETAERUS

Oh, yes! it's thanks to you that we roast our meat.

PROMETHEUS

I hate the gods, as you know.

PITHETAERUS

Aye, by Zeus, you have always detested them.

PROMETHEUS

Towards them I am a veritable Timon; but I must return in all haste, so give me the umbrella; if Zeus should see me from up there, he would think I was escorting one of the Canephori.

PITHETAERUS

Wait, take this stool as well.

(PROMETHEUS *leaves.* PITHETAERUS *goes into the thicket.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Near by the land of the Sciapodes there is a marsh, from the borders whereof the unwashed Socrates evokes the souls of men. Pisander came one day to see his soul, which he had left there when still alive. He offered a little victim, a camel, slit his throat and, following the example of Odysseus, stepped one pace backwards. Then that bat of a Chaerephon came up from hell to drink the camel's blood.

(POSIDON *enters, accompanied by* HERACLES *and* TRIBALLUS.)

POSIDON

This is the city of Nephelococcygia, to which we come as ambassadors. (*To* TRIBALLUS) Hi! what are you up to? you are throwing your cloak over the left shoulder. Come, fling it quick over the right! And why, pray, does it draggle in this fashion? Have you ulcers to hide like Læspodias? Oh! democracy! whither, oh! whither are you leading us? Is it possible that the gods have chosen such an envoy? You are undisturbed? Ugh! you cursed savage! you are by far the most barbarous of all the gods.— Tell me, Heracles, what are we going to do?

HERACLES

I have already told you that I want to strangle the fellow who dared to wall us out.

POSIDON

But, my friend, we are envoys of peace.

HERACLES

All the more reason why I wish to strangle him.

(PITHETAERUS *comes out of the thicket, followed by slaves, who are carrying various kitchen utensils; one of them sets up a table on which he places poultry dressed for roasting.*)

PITHETAERUS

Hand me the cheese-grater; bring me the silphium for sauce; pass me the cheese and watch the coals.

HERACLES

Mortal! we who greet you are three gods.

PITHETAERUS

Wait a bit till I have prepared my silphium pickle.

HERACLES

What are these meats?

PITHETAERUS

These are birds that have been punished with death for attacking the people's friends.

HERACLES

And you are going to season them before answering us?

PITHETAERUS (*looking up from his work for the first time*)

Ah! Heracles! welcome, welcome! What's the matter?

POSIDON

The gods have sent us here as ambassadors to treat for peace.

PITHETAERUS (*ignoring this*)

There's no more oil in the flask.

HERACLES

And yet the birds must be thoroughly basted with it.

POSIDON

We have no interest to serve in fighting you; as for you, be friends and we promise that you shall always have rain-water in your pools and the warmest of warm weather. So far as these points go we are plenipotentiaries.

PITHETAERUS

We have never been the aggressors, and even now we are as well disposed for peace as yourselves, provided you agree to one equitable condition, namely, that Zeus yield his sceptre to the birds. If only this is agreed to, I invite the ambassadors to dinner.

HERACLES

That's good enough for me. I vote for peace.

POSIDON

You wretch! you are nothing but a fool and a glutton. Do you want to dethrone your own father?

PITHETAERUS

What an error. Why, the gods will be much more powerful if the birds govern the earth. At present the mortals are hidden beneath the clouds, escape your observation, and commit perjury in your name; but if you had the birds for your allies, and a man, after having sworn by the crow and Zeus, should fail to keep his oath, the crow would dive down upon him unawares and pluck out his eye.

POSIDON

Well thought of, by Posidon!

HERACLES

My notion too.

PITHETAERUS (*to* TRIBALLUS)

And you, what's your opinion?

TRIBALLUS

Nabaisatreu.[34]

PITHETAERUS

D'you see? he also approves. But listen, here is another thing in which we can serve you. If a man vows to offer a sacrifice to some god, and then procrastinates, pretending that the gods can wait, and thus does not keep his word, we shall punish his stinginess.

POSIDON

Ah! and how?

PITHETAERUS

While he is counting his money or is in the bath, a kite will relieve him, before he knows it, either in coin or in clothes, of the value of a couple of sheep, and carry it to the god.

HERACLES

I vote for restoring them the sceptre.

POSIDON

Ask Triballus.

HERACLES

Hi! Triballus, do you want a thrashing?

TRIBALLUS

Sure, bashum head withum stick.[35]

HERACLES

He says, "Right willingly."

POSIDON

If that be the opinion of both of you, why, I consent too.

HERACLES

Very well! we accord you the sceptre.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! I was nearly forgetting another condition. I will leave Heré to Zeus, but only if the young Basileia is given me in marriage.

POSIDON

Then you don't want peace. Let us withdraw.

PITHETAERUS

It matters mighty little to me. Cook, look to the gravy.

HERACLES

What an odd fellow this Posidon is! Where are you off to? Are we going to war about a woman?

POSIDON

What else is there to do?

HERACLES

What else? Why, conclude peace.

POSIDON

Oh! you blockhead! do you always want to be fooled? Why, you are seeking your own downfall. If Zeus were to die, after having yielded them the sovereignty, you would be ruined, for you are the heir of all the wealth he will leave behind.

PITHETAERUS

Oh! by the gods! how he is cajoling you. Step aside, that I may have a word with you. Your uncle is getting the better of you, my poor friend. The law will not allow you an obolus of the paternal property, for you are a bastard and not a legitimate child.

HERACLES

I a bastard! What's that you tell me?

PITHETAERUS

Why, certainly; are you not born of a stranger woman? Besides, is not Athené recognized as Zeus' sole heiress? And no daughter would be that, if she had a legitimate brother.

HERACLES

But what if my father wished to give me his property on his death-bed, even though I be a bastard?

PITHETAERUS

The law forbids it, and this same Posidon would be the first to lay claim to his wealth, in virtue of being his legitimate brother. Listen; thus runs Solon's law: "A bastard shall not inherit, if there are legitimate children; and if there are no legitimate children, the property shall pass to the nearest kin."

HERACLES

And I get nothing whatever of the paternal property?

PITHETAERUS

Absolutely nothing. But tell me, has your father had you entered on the registers of his phratry?

HERACLES

No, and I have long been surprised at the omission.

PITHETAERUS

Why do you shake your fist at heaven? Do you want to fight? Why, be on my side, I will make you a king and will feed you on bird's milk and honey.

HERACLES

Your further condition seems fair to me. I cede you the young damsel.

POSIDON

But I, I vote against this opinion.

PITHETAERUS

Then it all depends on the Triballus. (*To the* TRIBALLUS) What do you say?

TRIBALLUS

Givum bird pretty gel bigum queen.

HERACLES

He says give her.

POSIDON

Why no, he does not say anything of the sort, or else, like the swallows he does not know how to walk.[36]

PITHETAERUS

Exactly so. Does he not say she must be given to the swallows?

POSIDON (*resignedly*)

All right, you two arrange the matter; make peace, since you wish it so; I'll hold my tongue.

HERACLES

We are of a mind to grant you all that you ask. But come up there with us to receive Basileia and the celestial bounty.

PITHETAERUS

Here are birds already dressed, and very suitable for a nuptial feast.

HERACLES

You go and, if you like, I will stay here to roast them.

PITHETAERUS

You to roast them? you are too much the glutton; come along with us.

HERACLES

Ah! how well I would have treated myself!

PITHETAERUS

Let some one bring me a beautiful and magnificent tunic for the wedding.

(*The tunic is brought.* PITHETAERUS *and the three gods depart.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

At Phanæ, near the Clepsydra, there dwells a people who have neither faith nor law, the Englottogastors, who reap, sow, pluck the vines and the figs [37] with their tongues; they belong to a barbaric race, and among them the Philippi and the Gorgiases are to be found; 'tis these Englottogastorian Philippi who introduced the custom all over Africa of cutting out the tongue separately at sacrifices.

(A MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER (*in tragic style*)

Oh, you, whose unbounded happiness I cannot express in words, thrice happy race of airy birds, receive your king in your fortunate dwellings. More brilliant than the brightest star that illumes the earth, he is approaching his glittering golden palace; the sun itself does not shine with more dazzling glory. He is entering with his bride at his side, whose

beauty no human tongue can express; in his hand he brandishes the lightning, the winged shaft of Zeus; perfumes of unspeakable sweetness pervade the ethereal realms. 'Tis a glorious spectacle to see the clouds of incense wafting in light whirlwinds before the breath of the zephyr! But here he is himself. Divine Muse! let thy sacred lips begin with songs of happy omen.

(PITHETAERUS *enters, with a crown on his head; he is accompanied by* BASILEIA.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Fall back! to the right! to the left! advance! Fly around this happy mortal, whom Fortune loads with her blessings. Oh! oh! what grace! what beauty! Oh, marriage so auspicious for our city! All honour to this man! 'tis through him that the birds are called to such glorious destinies. Let your nuptial hymns, your nuptial songs, greet him and his Basileia! 'Twas in the midst of such festivities that the Fates formerly united Olympian Heré to the King who governs the gods from the summit of his inaccessible throne. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus! Rosy Eros with the golden wings held the reins and guided the chariot; 'twas he, who presided over the union of Zeus and the fortunate Heré. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

PITHETAERUS

I am delighted with your songs, I applaud your verses. Now celebrate the thunder that shakes the earth, the flaming lightning of Zeus and the terrible flashing thunderbolt.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, thou golden flash of the lightning! oh, ye divine shafts of flame, that Zeus has hitherto shot forth! Oh, ye rolling thunders, that bring down the rain! 'Tis by the order of *our* king that ye shall now stagger the earth! Oh, Hymen! 'tis through thee that he commands the universe and that he makes Basileia, whom he has robbed from Zeus, take her seat at his side. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenæus!

PITHETAERUS (*singing*)

Let all the winged tribes of our fellow-citizens follow the bridal couple to the palace of Zeus and to the nuptial couch! Stretch forth your hands, my dear wife! Take hold of me by my wings and let us dance; I am going to lift you up and carry you through the air.

(PITHETAERUS *and* BASILEIA *leave dancing; the* CHORUS *follows them.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Alalaí! Iĕ Paión! Tenélla kálliníke! Loftiest art thou of gods!

1. Myrtle boughs were part of the necessary paraphernalia of sacrifice, and this rite was an indispensable feature of the ceremonial founding of a city.

2. An extraordinarily felicitous or unfortunate experience was ascribed to the benevolence or the malignity of no less than a dozen divinities.

3. One naturally expects Euelpides to say, "a bird or a man?" Aristophanes makes frequent use of this humorous figure, for which the Greeks had the technical term *para prosdokian,* "contrary to expectation."

4. A reference to Athens' naval supremacy.

5. There is a pun here on the Greek words *polos,* "pole" and *polis,* "city."

6. Epops swears by all that he holds most terrible.

7. This scene, in which various birds appear and are identified, is an excellent example of the artistic restraint which characterizes Aristophanes' maturity. It is highly amusing to have the birds represent human beings and thus afford opportunities for personal jibes, but this device is much more amusing for not being carried out completely. No less than twenty-eight species are introduced, and although it would doubtless have been possible to connect all of these with human individuals or races, the resulting scene would have been too long for the essential humour of its theme.

8. In this event the competitors wore full armour and had to run the length of the track, round a mark at the end of it, and run back to the starting line.

9. The Athenian Acropolis was infested with owls. To bring owls to Athens was thus carrying coals to Newcastle.

10. In the Greek the *popopopopopo* runs right into the word *pou,* "where?" and the *titititititiri* into *tina,* "what?" The effect is thus not merely birdlike, but also suggestive of a high pitch of excitement which causes the Leader of the Chorus to stutter. The second case could be rendered "t-t-t-t-t-t-t-tell me, etc." but the first seems quite untranslatable; there is nothing birdlike in "wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-where's the man who called me?"

11. A reference to the Feast of Pots, celebrated at Athens in honour of

Athené. The owl, an Athenian bird, will spare Pithetaerus and Euelpides when he recognizes their provenance by the stew-pots.

12. Since banqueters washed their hands before eating and wore chaplets at feasts, the suggestion is that the speech of Pithetaerus is to be something of a treat.

13. The appearance of the kite was a sign of Spring and was greeted with reverential actions.

14. Those in the ancient world who were too poor to afford a purse were wont to carry small coins in their mouths.

15. The origin and the meaning of this proverb are far from certain, but there is probably a play on two meanings of *psolos,* "circumcised" and "with erected penis." If the proverb was really current in Greece in this form it probably meant, "The cuckoo is here; time to stop making love and get to work." Euelpides then adapts it to the circumcised Egyptians and Phoenicians, in whose countries the cuckoo arrived at harvest time.

16. The connexions of these birds with the gods are various. The Greek word for coot is *phaleris,* which suggests the phallus. The duck lives in Posidon's realm. The gull is as voracious as Heracles. The wren was called *basiliskos,* "little king" because of Aesop's fable, according to which the birds had agreed to choose as their king the one who could fly the highest; the eagle naturally was victorious in this competition, but when he had ascended as far as he could, the wren, who had concealed himself in his plumage, took off from his back and flew a bit higher.

17. This comparison is made of Iris and Ilithyia in the *Hymn to Apollo* (114) and of Hera and Athené in the *Iliad* (V, 778).

18. The usual form of this proverb is reported to have been, "No one can see me, except some bird."

19. Golden ornaments seem not to have been worn by matrons in the ancient world; the restriction to young girls probably went back to Homeric times.

20. The antiquity and the importance of divination by the actions of birds had made the Greek word *ornis,* "bird" the regular term for "omen."

21. A pun of the Greek word *pappas,* which normally means "grandfather," but is also the name of some kind of bird, we do not know just what kind.

22. The Greek word for esparto is *spartos.* The pun on Sparta is thus one of the few that can be translated.

23. The flute-player was costumed as a raven, but also wore the *phorbeia,* "a sort of leathern muzzle fitting closely round the piper's mouth on each side of the pipe. It was intended to make the breath flow more evenly through the instrument."

24. A regular feature of the sacrificial rite was a basket of cane containing the sacred paraphernalia.

25. Buskins were a standard part of the tragic costume; here they are mentioned as symbolic of Meton's pompous manner. It does not follow that he was wearing them.

26. These were the ancient ballot-boxes; the Inspector has brought them along in order immediately to set democracy going in Nephelococcygia.

27. A jibe at the groundless tyrannophobia of the Athenians. See note 12 on *The Wasps.*

28. There is a pun here on the two meanings of the Greek word *aetos,* "eagle" and "gable."

29. An adaptation of the proverb, "To what use cannot hands be put?"

30. Iris must be visualized as speeding rapidly through the air with her robes flying like a ship's sails or the ribbons of a bonnet.

31. The buzzard is chosen with an eye to its name, *triorchos,* which also means "having three testicles."

32. A reference to the third of the Athenian choral competitions, in which dithyrambs were performed. Apparently each tribe supplied a chorus to compete in its name. Cinesias thus means that his talents are such that each tribe is eager to have him compose for and direct its chorus.

33. The pun here is hardly better in the Greek than in the translation; the word rendered "tribulation" is *epitribé.*

34. The word *nabaisatreu* is probably not designed to mean anything, but the first two letters suggest the Greek affirmative particles *ne* and *nai,* and this is all that Pithetaerus needs.

35. The broken Greek of Triballus seems here to be a threat in answer to that of Heracles, but its interpretation is very uncertain.

36. The meaning of Triballus' remark is wholly clear; the point of Posidon's, however, is undiscoverable.

37. A pun on the word *sykon,* "fig" and *sykophantes,* "informer." The etymology of the latter word is very obscure. The connexion with *sykon* seems obvious enough, but this does not help much.

VII
LYSISTRATA

Characters in the Play

Lysistrata
Cleonicé
Myrrhiné
Lampito
Magistrates
Cinesias
Child of Cinesias
Herald of the Lacedaemonians
Envoys of the Lacedaemonians
An Athenian Citizen
Chorus of Old Men
Chorus of Women

INTRODUCTION

THREE years after the production of *The Birds,* Aristophanes brought out *Lysistrata* at the Lenaean festival of 411. We have no information on the award of the prizes, and although it is difficult to imagine how a better comedy can have been produced on that occasion, we know enough of the unpredictable whims of Athenian popular taste to realize that Aristophanes may very well have been disappointed in the reception accorded one of his most excellent productions. Although the theme of the play classes it with *The Acharnians* and *Peace,* its atmosphere and treatment are radically different from those of its predecessors. The two earlier peace-plays are fantastic in detail but realistic in essence. In 425, Athens might have concluded a wise and profitable truce with Sparta, and in 421, it must have seemed that the trials and the tribulations of the war would soon be things of the past. In 411, however, Athens had her back against the wall and was fighting for her life; peace could have been obtained only by a surrender at once complete and disastrous. The pacific fantasy of *Lysistrata* is thus far more thoroughly divorced from contemporary realities than that of either *Peace* or *The Acharnians,* and in keeping with this the idealistic revery which it presents is panhellenic and Utopian to an extent which renders the play spiritually much more closely akin to *The Birds* and *The Ecclesiazusae* than to any of the earlier comedies. At the same time it looks to the future more clearly than any other play of Aristophanes that has come down to us, for its timelessness is almost equal to that of the New Comedy and far in excess of anything that we find in the Old. This should have made it in modern times the most popular of the poet's compositions, and the fact that it has not been so is a sad tribute to the omnipotence of Christian prudery, but the success of a not too emasculated adaptation produced in New York in 1930 might induce the true son of the twentieth century, who is also a philhellenist, to hope that his grandchildren may dwell in a clearer and healthier atmosphere.

As the play opens we see Lysistrata pacing up and down in front of her house, in a state of great excitement and annoyance. Her plans have been

carefully laid and the moment for action is at hand; the women of Athens have been sent to seize the Acropolis and female representatives of various other states in Greece have agreed to meet her here at this time; and they are not here. Finally they do arrive, and when all have assembled Lysistrata unfolds her plan. It is a magnificent and well-conceived scheme, whereby the women of Greece are to force their husbands to put an end to the war, by the simple expedient of refusing to lie with them. But its authoress has not adequately estimated the reluctance of the women to deprive themselves of corporeal delights. Like all revolutionary leaders, she is herself undersexed, and only the loyal support of the athletic Lampito, the delegate from hardy Sparta, prevents the cause from dying an ignoble and infant death. The other women ultimately steel their hearts and still their qualms, and an awful oath of celibacy is tearfully sworn over a bowl of wine.

A great commotion heard offstage testifies to the occupation of the Acropolis, and the revolution is now in full swing. Lysistrata and the other Athenians go to join their active countrywomen, while the delegates from abroad set out to incite similar insurrections in their respective cities. The scene shifts to the entrance of the Acropolis, and a group of old men, who constitute one of the two Choruses in the play, come slowly and painfully up the steep path, carrying faggots and logs and pots of fire. They intend to smoke the women out of the citadel, but meet with unexpected and effective resistance from a group of women who make up the other Chorus. Armed with pots of water and inspired by revolutionary zeal, they drench the old men and extinguish their fire. The first attempt at suppression has thus been successfully repulsed, but another difficulty now appears in the person of a magistrate accompanied by Scythian policemen. He orders his officers to force the gates and arrest Lysistrata, but the heroine forestalls this by coming out of the Acropolis voluntarily. The magistrate immediately orders his Scythians to seize her, but Lysistrata's cohorts rush at them so fiercely that they retire in trepidation and defecation. The cowardice of his officers thus compels the disappointed magistrate to shift from deeds to words, and Lysistrata eloquently expounds her plan and explains her actions. Her words are fruitless, of course, and the women turn to deeds, sousing the official with water and dressing him up like a corpse on the bier. He departs in towering and helpless wrath, to show his fellow magistrates the treatment he has received, and the victorious women retire into the Acropolis.

The stage is thus left to the two Choruses, and we expect them to cooperate in delivering a parabasis. The interlude which follows, however, is in substance merely an argument between the sexes, although it exhibits the formal features of ode and epirrheme. There are no anapæsts, and the passage is thus formally reminiscent of the second parabasis in

The Birds, with the difference that in the present instance each of the parts is found twice, because of the presence of two choruses.

Several days must be supposed to have elapsed during this interlude. At its conclusion Lysistrata steps forth from the Acropolis in deep anxiety and disillusionment, and we learn that she is experiencing the characteristic difficulties of a revolutionary leader. Initial enthusiasm has cooled, with the result that attempted defections are growing more and more numerous. Feminine frailty is becoming increasingly inadequate to the strain of living on the Acropolis with the owls and without the men. A series of instances of intended desertion now ensues; there is wool at home to be spread, and flax to be stripped, and the hooting of the owls is unbearable. The most ingenious of the women has slipped the sacred helmet of Pallas under her robe and asks Lysistrata's permission to go to the midwife, immediately. The revolution seems destined to fail in a very short time, but just at the moment when things look blackest the enemy shows signs of weakness, and Cinesias, the husband of one of Lysistrata's high command, named Myrrhiné, enters. The condition of his household is deplorable, but his own is patently worse, and Lysistrata instructs his wife to make the wretched man the fulcrum of the revolution's success. The obedient subordinate carries out her orders with fiendish thoroughness, tantalizing her husband beyond all human endurance, and finally leaving him much more tortured than he was before. The tide has now turned and the agonized enemy will soon capitulate. A herald arrives from Sparta, and his figure leaves no doubt that Lampito has been as effective as Lysistrata; "Are you a man or a Priapus?" asks the Athenian official who meets him, "or is that a lance you're hiding under your clothes?" Soon the envoys arrive and Lysistrata wisely reconciles the opposing parties; peace is made and the comedy ends in general rejoicing.

So far as the extant material enables us to judge, *Lysistrata* is the first comedy of Aristophanes in which women form the chorus or play any important rôle. Evidently the poet found this type of play enjoyable to write, for there are two others amongst the eleven in which the chorus or the principal characters are female. The feminine triad consistently exhibits Aristophanes' wit at its most brilliant best, but this is only what would be expected by anyone candid enough to recognize that the sexual phenomena of human life are the most copious sources of the finest humour. It is regrettable and thoroughly human that those persons to whom this fact needs to be pointed out are invariably unwilling or unable to accept it when it is pointed out; *Lysistrata* is not for them.

LYSISTRATA

(SCENE:—*At the base of the Orchestra are two buildings, the house of* LYSISTRATA *and the entrance to the Acropolis; a winding and narrow path leads up to the latter. Between the two buildings is the opening of the Cave of Pan.* LYSISTRATA *is pacing up and down in front of her house.*)

LYSISTRATA

AH! if only they had been invited to a Bacchic revelling, or a feast of Pan or Aphrodité or Genetyllis, why! the streets would have been impassable for the thronging tambourines! Now there's never a woman here—ah! except my neighbour Cleonicé, whom I see approaching yonder. . . . Good day, Cleonicé.

CLEONICÉ

Good day, Lysistrata; but pray, why this dark, forbidding face, my dear? Believe me, you don't look a bit pretty with those black lowering brows.

LYSISTRATA

Oh, Cleonicé, my heart is on fire; I blush for our sex. Men *will* have it we are tricky and sly. . . .

CLEONICÉ

And they are quite right, upon my word!

LYSISTRATA

Yet, look you, when the women are summoned to meet for a matter of the greatest importance, they lie in bed instead of coming.

CLEONICÉ

Oh! they will come, my dear; but it's not easy, you know, for women to leave the house. One is busy pottering about her husband; another is getting the servant up; a third is putting her child asleep or washing the brat or feeding it.

LYSISTRATA

But I tell you, the business that calls them here is far and away more urgent.

CLEONICÉ

And why *do* you summon us, dear Lysistrata? What is it all about?

LYSISTRATA

About a big thing.

CLEONICÉ (*taking this in a different sense; with great interest*)

And is it thick too?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, very thick

CLEONICÉ

And we are not all on the spot! Imagine!

LYSISTRATA (*wearily*)

Oh! if it were what you suppose, there would be never an absentee. No, no, it concerns a thing I have turned about and about this way and that *so* many sleepless nights.

CLEONICÉ (*still unable to be serious*)

It must be something mighty fine and subtle for you to have turned it about so!

LYSISTRATA

So fine, it means just this, Greece saved by the women!

CLEONICÉ

By the women! Why, its salvation hangs on a poor thread then!

LYSISTRATA

Our country's fortunes depend on us—it is with us to undo utterly the Peloponnesians.

CLEONICÉ

That would be a noble deed truly!

LYSISTRATA

To exterminate the Boeotians to a man!

CLEONICÉ

But surely you would spare the eels.

LYSISTRATA

For Athens' sake I will never threaten so fell a doom; trust me for that. However, if the Boeotian and Peloponnesian women join us, Greece is saved.

CLEONICÉ

But how should women perform so wise and glorious an achievement, we women who dwell in the retirement of the household, clad in diaphanous garments of yellow silk and long flowing gowns, decked out with flowers and shod with dainty little slippers?

LYSISTRATA

Ah, but those are the very sheet-anchors of our salvation—those yellow tunics, those scents and slippers, those cosmetics and transparent robes.

CLEONICÉ

How so, pray?

LYSISTRATA

There is not a man will wield a lance against another . . .

CLEONICÉ

Quick, I will get me a yellow tunic from the dyer's.

LYSISTRATA

. . . or want a shield.

CLEONICÉ

I'll run and put on a flowing gown.

LYSISTRATA

. . . or draw a sword.

CLEONICÉ

I'll haste and buy a pair of slippers this instant.

LYSISTRATA

Now tell me, would not the women have done best to come?

CLEONICÉ

Why, they should have *flown* here!

LYSISTRATA

Ah! my dear, you'll see that like true Athenians, they will do everything too late.[1] . . . Why, there's not a woman come from the shore, not one from Salamis.

CLEONICÉ

But I know for certain they embarked at daybreak.

LYSISTRATA

And the dames from Acharnae! why, I thought they would have been the very first to arrive.

CLEONICÉ

Theagenes' wife at any rate is sure to come; she has actually been to consult Hecaté. . . . But look! here are some arrivals—and there are more behind. Ah! ha! now what countrywomen may they be?

LYSISTRATA

They are from Anagyra.

CLEONICÉ

Yes! upon my word, 'tis a levy *en masse* of all the female population of Anagyra!

(MYRRHINÉ *enters, followed by other women.*)

MYRRHINÉ

Are we late, Lysistrata? Tell us, pray; what, not a word?

LYSISTRATA

I cannot say much for you, Myrrhiné! you have not bestirred yourself overmuch for an affair of such urgency.

MYRRHINÉ

I could not find my girdle in the dark. However, if the matter is so pressing, here we are; so speak.

CLEONICÉ

No, let's wait a moment more, till the women of Boeotia arrive and those from the Peloponnese.

LYSISTRATA

Yes, that is best. . . . Ah! here comes Lampito. (LAMPITO, *a husky Spartan damsel, enters with three others, two from Boeotia and one from Corinth.*) Good day, Lampito, dear friend from Lacedaemon. How well and handsome you look! what a rosy complexion! and how strong you seem; why, you could strangle a bull surely!

LAMPITO

Yes, indeed, I really think I could. It's because I do gymnastics and practise the bottom-kicking dance.

CLEONICÉ (*opening* LAMPITO'S *robe and baring her bosom*)
And what superb breasts!

LAMPITO
La! you are feeling me as if I were a beast for sacrifice.

LYSISTRATA
And this young woman, where is she from?

LAMPITO
She is a noble lady from Boeotia.

LYSISTRATA
Ah! my pretty Boeotian friend, you are as blooming as a garden.

CLEONICÉ (*making another inspection*)
Yes, on my word! and her "garden" is so thoroughly weeded too!

LYSISTRATA (*pointing to the Corinthian*)
And who is this?

LAMPITO
'Tis an honest woman, by my faith! she comes from Corinth.

CLEONICÉ
Oh! honest, no doubt then—as honesty goes at Corinth.

LAMPITO
But who has called together this council of women, pray?

LYSISTRATA
I have.

LAMPITO
Well then, tell us what you want of us.

CLEONICÉ
Yes, please tell us! What *is* this very important business you wish to inform us about?

LYSISTRATA
I will tell you. But first answer me one question.

CLEONICÉ
Anything you wish.

LYSISTRATA

Don't you feel sad and sorry because the fathers of your children are far away from you with the army? For I'll wager there is not one of you whose husband is not abroad at this moment.

CLEONICÉ

Mine has been the last five months in Thrace—looking after Eucrates.

MYRRHINÉ

It's seven long months since mine left for Pylos.

LAMPITO

As for mine, if he ever does return from service, he's no sooner home than he takes down his shield again and flies back to the wars.

LYSISTRATA

And not so much as the shadow of a lover! Since the day the Milesians betrayed us, I have never once seen an eight-inch gadget even, to be a leathern consolation to us poor widows. . . . Now tell me, if I have discovered a means of ending the war, will you all second me?

CLEONICÉ

Yes verily, by all the goddesses, I swear I will, though I have to put my gown in pawn, and drink the money the same day.[2]

MYRRHINÉ

And so will I, though I must be split in two like a flat-fish, and have half myself removed.

LAMPITO

And I too; why to secure peace, I would climb to the top of Mount Taygetus.

LYSISTRATA

Then I will out with it at last, my mighty secret! Oh! sister women, if we would compel our husbands to make peace, we must refrain . . .

CLEONICÉ

Refrain from what? tell us, tell us!

LYSISTRATA

But will you do it?

MYRRHINÉ

We will, we will, though we should die of it.

LYSISTRATA

We must refrain from the male altogether. . . . Nay, why do you turn your backs on me? Where are you going? So, you bite your lips, and shake your heads, eh? Why these pale, sad looks? why these tears? Come, will you do it—yes or no? Do you hesitate?

CLEONICÉ

I will not do it, let the war go on.

MYRRHINÉ

Nor will I; let the war go on.

LYSISTRATA (*to* MYRRHINÉ)

And you say this, my pretty flat-fish, who declared just now they might split you in two?

CLEONICÉ

Anything, anything but that! Bid me go through the fire, if you will; but to rob us of the sweetest thing in all the world, Lysistrata darling!

LYSISTRATA (*to* MYRRHINÉ)

And you?

MYRRHINÉ

Yes, I agree with the others; I too would sooner go through the fire.

LYSISTRATA

Oh, wanton, vicious sex! the poets have done well to make tragedies upon us; we are good for nothing then but love and lewdness! But you, my dear, you from hardy Sparta, if *you* join me, all may yet be well; help me, second me, I beg you.

LAMPITO

'Tis a hard thing, by the two goddesses it is! for a woman to sleep alone without ever a strong male in her bed. But there, peace must come first.

LYSISTRATA

Oh, my darling, my dearest, best friend, you are the only one deserving the name of woman!

CLEONICÉ

But if—which the gods forbid—we do refrain altogether from what you say, should we get peace any sooner?

LYSISTRATA

Of course we should, by the goddesses twain! We need only sit indoors with painted cheeks, and meet our mates lightly clad in transparent gowns of Amorgos silk, and perfectly depilated; they will get their tools up and be wild to lie with us. That will be the time to refuse, and they will hasten to make peace, I am convinced of that!

LAMPITO

Yes, just as Menelaus, when he saw Helen's naked bosom, threw away his sword, they say.

CLEONICÉ

But, oh dear, suppose our husbands go away and leave us.

LYSISTRATA

Then, as Pherecrates says, we must "flay a skinned dog," that's all.

CLEONICÉ

Fiddlesticks! these proverbs are all idle talk. . . . But if our husbands drag us by main force into the bedchamber?

LYSISTRATA

Hold on to the door posts.

CLEONICÉ

But if they beat us?

LYSISTRATA

Then yield to their wishes, but with a bad grace; there is no pleasure in it for them, when they do it by force. Besides, there are a thousand ways of tormenting them. Never fear, they'll soon tire of the game; there's no satisfaction for a man, unless the woman shares it.

CLEONICÉ

Very well, if you *must* have it so, we agree.

LAMPITO

For ourselves, no doubt we shall persuade our husbands to conclude a fair and honest peace; but there is the Athenian populace, how are we to cure these folk of their warlike frenzy?

LYSISTRATA

Have no fear; we undertake to make our own people listen to reason.

LAMPITO

That's impossible, so long as they have their trusty ships and the vast treasures stored in the temple of Athené.

LYSISTRATA

Ah! but we have seen to that; this very day the Acropolis will be in our hands. That is the task assigned to the older women; while we are here in council, they are going, under pretence of offering sacrifice, to seize the citadel.

LAMPITO

Well said indeed! everything is going for the best.

LYSISTRATA

Come, quick, Lampito, and let us bind ourselves by an inviolable oath.

LAMPITO

Recite the terms; we will swear to them.

LYSISTRATA

With pleasure. Where is our Scythian policewoman? Now, what are *you* staring at, pray? Lay this shield on the earth before us, its hollow upwards, and someone bring me the victim's inwards.

CLEONICÉ

Lysistrata, say, what oath are we to swear?

LYSISTRATA

What oath? Why, in Aeschylus, they sacrifice a sheep, and swear over a buckler; [3] we will do the same.

CLEONICÉ

No, Lysistrata, one cannot swear peace over a *buckler,* surely.

LYSISTRATA

What other oath do you prefer?

CLEONICÉ

Let's take a white horse, and sacrifice it, and swear on its entrails.

LYSISTRATA

But where shall we *get* a white horse?

CLEONICÉ

Well, what oath shall we take then?

LYSISTRATA

Listen to me. Let's set a great black bowl on the ground; let's sacrifice a skin of Thasian wine into it, and take oath not to add one single drop of water.

LAMPITO

Ah! that's an oath pleases me more than I can say.

LYSISTRATA

Let them bring me a bowl and a skin of wine.

CLEONICÉ

Ah! my dears, what a noble big bowl! what fun it will be to empty it!

LYSISTRATA

Set the bowl down on the ground, and lay your hands on the victim. . . . Almighty goddess, Persuasion, and thou, bowl, boon comrade of joy and merriment, receive this our sacrifice, and be propitious to us poor women!

CLEONICÉ (*as* LYSISTRATA *pours the wine into the bowl*)

Oh! the fine red blood! how well it flows!

LAMPITO

And what a delicious bouquet, by Castor!

CLEONICÉ

Now, my dears, let me swear first, if you please.

LYSISTRATA

No, by Aphrodité, unless it's decided by lot. But come, then, Lampito, and all of you, put your hands to the bowl; and do you, Cleonicé, repeat for all the rest the solemn terms I am going to recite. Then you must all swear, and pledge yourselves by the same promises,—*I will have naught to do whether with lover or husband . . .*

CLEONICÉ (*faintly*)

I will have naught to do whether with lover or husband . . .

LYSISTRATA

Albeit he come to me with an erection . . .

CLEONICÉ (*her voice quavering*)

Albeit he came to me with an erection . . . (*in despair*) Oh! Lysistrata, I cannot *bear* it!

LYSISTRATA (*ignoring this outburst*)

I will live at home unbulled . . .

CLEONICÉ

I will live at home unbulled . . .

LYSISTRATA
Beautifully dressed and wearing a saffron-coloured gown . . .

CLEONICÉ
Beautifully dressed and wearing a saffron-coloured gown . . .

LYSISTRATA
To the end I may inspire my husband with the most ardent longings.

CLEONICÉ
To the end I may inspire my husband with the most ardent longings.

LYSISTRATA
Never will I give myself voluntarily . . .

CLEONICÉ
Never will I give myself voluntarily . . .

LYSISTRATA
And if he has me by force . . .

CLEONICÉ
And if he has me by force . . .

LYSISTRATA
I will be cold as ice, and never stir a limb . . .

CLEONICÉ
I will be cold as ice, and never stir a limb . . .

LYSISTRATA
I will neither extend my Persian slippers toward the ceiling . . .

CLEONICÉ
I will neither extend my Persian slippers toward the ceiling . . .

LYSISTRATA
Nor will I crouch like the carven lions on a knife-handle.

CLEONICÉ
Nor will I crouch like the carven lions on a knife-handle.

LYSISTRATA
And if I keep my oath, may I be suffered to drink of this wine.

CLEONICÉ (*more courageously*)
And if I keep my oath, may I be suffered to drink of this wine.

LYSISTRATA

But if I break it, let my bowl be filled with water.

CLEONICÉ

But if I break it, let my bowl be filled with water.

LYSISTRATA

Will you all take this oath?

ALL

We do.

LYSISTRATA

Then I'll now consume this remnant.

(*She drinks.*)

CLEONICÉ (*reaching for the cup*)

Enough, enough, my dear; now let us all drink in turn to cement our friendship.

(*They pass the cup around and all drink. A great commotion is heard off stage.*)

LAMPITO

Listen! what do those cries mean?

LYSISTRATA

It's what I was telling you; the women have just occupied the Acropolis So now, Lampito, you return to Sparta to organize the plot, while your comrades here remain as hostages. For ourselves, let us go and join the rest in the citadel, and let us push the bolts well home.

CLEONICÉ

But don't you think the men will march up against us?

LYSISTRATA

I laugh at them. Neither threats nor flames shall force our doors; they shall open only on the conditions I have named.

CLEONICÉ

Yes, yes, by Aphrodité; otherwise we should be called cowardly and wretched women.

(*She follows* LYSISTRATA *out.*)

(*The scene shifts to the entrance of the Acropolis. The* CHORUS OF OLD MEN *slowly enters, carrying faggots and pots of fire.*)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Go easy, Draces, go easy; why, your shoulder is all chafed by these damned heavy olive stocks. But forward still, forward, man, as needs must.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

What unlooked-for things do happen, to be sure, in a long life! Ah! Strymodorus, who would ever have thought it? Here we have the women, who used, for our misfortune, to eat our bread and live in our houses, daring nowadays to lay hands on the holy image of the goddess, to seize the Acropolis and draw bars and bolts to keep any from entering!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Come, Philurgus, man, let's hurry there; let's lay our faggots all about the citadel, and on the blazing pile burn with our hands these vile conspiratresses, one and all—and Lycon's wife first and foremost!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

Nay, by Demeter, never will I let them laugh at me, whiles I have a breath left in my body. Cleomenes himself, the first who ever seized our citadel, had to quit it to his sore dishonour; spite his Lacedaemonian pride, he had to deliver me up his arms and slink off with a single garment to his back. My word! but he was filthy and ragged! and what an unkempt beard, to be sure! He had not had a bath for six long years!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh! but that was a mighty siege! Our men were ranged seventeen deep before the gate, and never left their posts, even to sleep. These women, these enemies of Euripides and all the gods, shall I do nothing to hinder their inordinate insolence? else let them tear down my trophies of Marathon.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

But look, to finish this toilsome climb only this last steep bit is left to mount. Truly, it's no easy job without beasts of burden, and how these logs do bruise my shoulder! Still let us carry on, and blow up our fire and see it does not go out just as we reach our destination. Phew! phew! (*Blowing the fire*) Oh! dear! what a dreadful smoke!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

It bites my eyes like a mad dog. It is Lemnian fire for sure, or it would never devour my eyelids like this. Come on, Laches, let's

hurry, let's bring succour to the goddess; it's now or never! Phew! phew! (*Blowing the fire*) Oh dear! what a confounded smoke!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

There now, there's our fire all bright and burning, thank the gods! Now, why not first put down our loads here, then take a vine-branch, light it at the brazier and hurl it at the gate by way of battering-ram? If they don't answer our summons by pulling back the bolts, then we set fire to the woodwork, and the smoke will choke them. Ye gods! what a smoke! Pfaugh! Is there never a Samian general will help me unload my burden? —Ah! it shall not gall my shoulder any more. (*Setting down the wood*) Come, brazier, do your duty, make the embers flare, that I may kindle a brand; I want to be the first to hurl one. Aid me, heavenly Victory; let us punish for their insolent audacity the women who have seized our citadel, and may we raise a trophy of triumph for success!

(*They begin to build a fire. The* CHORUS OF WOMEN *now enters, carrying pots of water.*)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Oh! my dears, methinks I see fire and smoke; can it be a conflagration? Let us hurry all we can.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

Fly, fly, Nicodicé, ere Calycé and Critylle perish in the fire, or are stifled in the smoke raised by these accursed old men and their pitiless laws. But, great gods, can it be I come too late? Rising at dawn, I had the utmost trouble to fill this vessel at the fountain. Oh! what a crowd there was, and what a din! What a rattling of water-pots! Servants and slave-girls pushed and thronged me! However, here I have it full at last; and I am running to carry the water to my fellow-townswomen, whom our foes are plotting to burn alive.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

News has been brought us that a company of old, doddering greybeards, loaded with enormous faggots, as if they wanted to heat a furnace, have taken the field, vomiting dreadful threats, crying that they must reduce to ashes these horrible women. Suffer them not, oh! goddess, but, of thy grace, may I see Athens and Greece cured of their warlike folly. 'Tis to this end, oh! thou guardian deity of our city, goddess of the golden crest, that they have seized thy sanctuary. Be their friend and ally, Athené, and if any man hurl against them lighted firebrands, aid us to carry water to extinguish them.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

What is this I see, ye wretched old men? Honest and pious folk ye cannot be who act so vilely.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah, ha! here's something new! a swarm of women stand posted outside to defend the gates!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Fart at us, would you? we seem a mighty host, yet you do not see the ten-thousandth part of our sex.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ho, Phaedrias! shall we stop their cackle? Suppose one of us were to break a stick across their backs, eh?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Let us set down our water-pots on the ground, to be out of the way, if they should dare to offer us violence.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Let someone knock out two or three teeth for them, as they did to Bupalus; they won't talk so loud then.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Come on then; I wait you with unflinching foot, and no other bitch will ever grab your balls.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Silence! or my stick will cut short your days.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Now, just you dare to touch Stratyllis with the tip of your finger!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

And if I batter you to pieces with my fists, what will you do?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I will tear out your lungs and entrails with my teeth.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh! what a clever poet is Euripides! how well he says that woman is the most shameless of animals.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Let's pick up our water-jars again, Rhodippé.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN
You damned women, what do you mean to do here with your water?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN
And you, old death-in-life, with your fire? Is it to cremate yourself?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN
I am going to build you a pyre to roast your female friends upon.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN
And I,—I am going to put out your fire.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN
You put out my fire—*you?*

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN
Yes, you shall soon see.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN
I don't know what prevents me from roasting you with this torch.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN
I am getting you a bath ready to clean off the filth.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN
A bath for *me,* you dirty slut?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN
Yes, indeed, a nuptial bath—tee hee!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*turning to his followers*)
Do you hear that? What insolence!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN
I am a free woman, I tell you.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN
I will make you hold your tongue, never fear!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN
Ah ha! you shall never sit any more amongst the Heliasts.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*to his torch*)
Burn off her hair for her!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN (*to her pot*)
Achelous, do your duty!
(*The women pitch the water in their water-pots over the old men.*)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Was it hot?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Hot, great gods! Enough, enough!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I'm watering you, to make you bloom afresh.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Alas! I am too dry! Ah, me how! how I am trembling with cold!

(*A* MAGISTRATE *enters, with a few Scythian policemen.*)

MAGISTRATE

These women, have they made din enough, I wonder, with their tambourines? bewept Adonis enough upon their terraces? I was listening to the speeches last assembly day, and Demostratus, whom heaven confound! was saying we must all go over to Sicily—and lo! his wife was dancing round repeating: "Alas! alas! Adonis, woe is me for Adonis!" Demostratus was saying we must levy hoplites at Zacynthus—and there was his wife, more than half drunk, screaming on the house-roof: "Weep, weep for Adonis!"—while that infamous *Mad Ox* was bellowing away on his side.—Do you not blush, you women, for your wild and uproarious doings?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

But you don't know all their effrontery yet! They abused and insulted us; then soused us with the water in their water-pots, and have set us wringing out our clothes, for all the world as if we had bepissed ourselves.

MAGISTRATE

And well done too, by Posidon! We men must share the blame of their ill conduct; it is we who teach them to love riot and dissoluteness and sow the seeds of wickedness in their hearts. You see a husband go into a shop: "Look you, jeweller," says he, "you remember the necklace you made for my wife. Well, the other evening, when she was dancing, the catch came open. Now, I am bound to start for Salamis; will you make it convenient to go up to-night to make her fastening secure?" Another will go to the cobbler, a great, strong fellow, with a great, long tool, and tell him: "The strap of one of my wife's sandals presses her little toe, which is extremely sensitive; come in about midday to supple the thing and stretch it." Now see the results. Take my own case—as a Magistrate

I have enlisted rowers; I want money to pay them, and the women slam the door in my face. But why do we stand here with arms crossed? Bring me a crowbar; *I'll* chastise their insolence!—Ho! there, my fine fellow! (*to one of the Scythians*) what are you gaping at the crows for? looking for a tavern, I suppose, eh? Come on, bring crowbars here, and force open the gates. I will put a hand to the work myself.

LYSISTRATA (*opening the gate and walking out*)

No need to force the gates; I am coming out—here I am. And why bolts and bars? What we want here is not bolts and bars and locks, but common sense.

MAGISTRATE (*jumping nervously, then striving manfully to regain his dignity*)

Really, my fine lady! Where is my officer? I want him to tie that woman's hands behind her back.

LYSISTRATA

By Artemis, the virgin goddess! if he touches me with the tip of his finger, officer of the public peace though he be, let him look out for himself!

(*The first Scythian defecates in terror.*)

MAGISTRATE (*to another officer*)

How now, are you afraid? Seize her, I tell you, round the body. Two of you at her, and have done with it!

CLEONICÉ

By Pandrosos! if you lay a hand on her, I'll trample you underfoot till the crap comes out of you!

(*The second Scythian defecates in terror.*)

MAGISTRATE

Look at the mess you've made! Where is there another officer? (*To the third Scythian*) Bind *that* minx first, the one who speaks so prettily!

MYRRHINÉ

By Phoebé, if you touch her with one finger, you'd better call quick for a surgeon!

(*The third Scythian defecates in terror.*)

MAGISTRATE

What's that? Where's the officer? (*To the fourth Scythian*) Lay hold of her. Oh! but I'm going to stop your foolishness for you all!

CLEONICÉ

By the Tauric Artemis, if you go near her, I'll pull out your hair, scream as you like.

(*The fourth Scythian defecates in terror.*)

MAGISTRATE

Ah! miserable man that I am! My own officers desert me. What ho! are we to let ourselves be bested by a mob of women? Ho! Scythians mine, close up your ranks, and forward!

LYSISTRATA

By the holy goddesses! you'll have to make acquaintance with four companies of women, ready for the fray and well armed to boot.

MAGISTRATE

Forward, Scythians, and bind them!

(*The Scythians advance reluctantly.*)

LYSISTRATA

Forward, my gallant companions; march forth, ye vendors of grain and eggs, garlic and vegetables, keepers of taverns and bakeries, wrench and strike and tear; come, a torrent of invective and insult! (*They beat the Scythians who retire in haste.*) Enough, enough! now retire, never rob the vanquished!

(*The women withdraw.*)

MAGISTRATE

How unfortunate for my officers!

LYSISTRATA

Ah, ha! so you thought you had only to do with a set of slave-women! you did not know the ardour that fills the bosom of free-born dames.

MAGISTRATE

Ardour! yes, by Apollo, ardour enough—especially for the wine-cup!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Sir, sir! what good are words? they are of no avail with wild beasts of this sort. Don't you know how they have just washed us down—and with no very fragrant soap!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

What would you have? You should never have laid rash hands on us. If you start afresh, I'll knock your eyes out. My delight is to stay at home as coy as a young maid, without hurting anybody or moving any more than a milestone; but 'ware the wasps, if you go stirring up the wasps' nest!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

Ah! great gods! how get the better of these ferocious creatures? 'tis past all bearing! But come, let us try to find out the reason of the dreadful scourge. With what end in view have they seized the citadel of Cranaus, the sacred shrine that is raised upon the inaccessible rock of the Acropolis?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*to the* MAGISTRATE)

Question them; be cautious and not too credulous. It would be culpable negligence not to pierce the mystery, if we may.

MAGISTRATE (*addressing the women*)

I would ask you first why you have barred our gates.

LYSISTRATA

To seize the treasury; no more money, no more war.

MAGISTRATE

Then money is the cause of the war?

LYSISTRATA

And of all our troubles. It was to find occasion to steal that Pisander and all the other agitators were forever raising revolutions. Well and good! but they'll never get another drachma here.

MAGISTRATE

What do you propose to do then, pray?

LYSISTRATA

You ask me that! Why, we propose to administer the treasury ourselves.

MAGISTRATE

You do?

LYSISTRATA

What is there in that to surprise you? Do we not administer the budget of household expenses?

MAGISTRATE

But that is not the same thing.

LYSISTRATA

How so—not the same thing?

MAGISTRATE

It is the treasury supplies the expenses of the war.

LYSISTRATA

That's our first principle—no war!

MAGISTRATE

What! and the safety of the city?

LYSISTRATA

We will provide for that.

MAGISTRATE

You?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, *we!*

MAGISTRATE

What a sorry business!

LYSISTRATA

Yes, we're going to save you, whether you like it or not.

MAGISTRATE

Oh! the impudence of the creatures!

LYSISTRATA

You seem annoyed! but it has to be done, nevertheless.

MAGISTRATE

But it's the very height of iniquity!

LYSISTRATA (*testily*)

We're going to *save* you, my good man.

MAGISTRATE

But if I don't *want* to be saved?

LYSISTRATA

Why, all the more reason!

MAGISTRATE

But what a notion, to concern yourselves with questions of peace and war!

LYSISTRATA

We will explain our idea.

MAGISTRATE

Out with it then; quick, or . . . (*threatening her*).

LYSISTRATA (*sternly*)

Listen, and never a movement, please!

MAGISTRATE (*in impotent rage*)

Oh! it is too much for me! I cannot keep my temper!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Then look out for yourself; you have more to fear than we have.

MAGISTRATE

Stop your croaking, you old crow! (*To* LYSISTRATA) Now you, say what you have to say.

LYSISTRATA

Willingly. All the long time the war has lasted, we have endured in modest silence all you men did; you never allowed us to open our lips. We were far from satisfied, for we knew how things were going; often in our homes we would hear you discussing, upside down and inside out, some important turn of affairs. Then with sad hearts, but smiling lips, we would ask you: Well, in today's Assembly did they vote peace?—But, "Mind your own business!" the husband would growl, "Hold your tongue, please!" And we would say no more.

CLEONICÉ

I would not have held *my* tongue though, not I!

MAGISTRATE

You would have been reduced to silence by blows then.

LYSISTRATA

Well, for my part, I would say no more. But presently I would come to know you had arrived at some fresh decision more fatally foolish than ever. "Ah! my dear man," I would say, "what madness next!" But he would only look at me askance and say: "Just weave your web, please; else your cheeks will smart for hours. War is men's business!"

MAGISTRATE

Bravo! well said indeed!

LYSISTRATA

How now, wretched man? not to let us contend against your follies was bad enough! But presently we heard you asking out loud in the open street: "Is there never a man left in Athens?" and, "No, not one, not one," you were assured in reply. Then, then we made up our minds without more delay to make common cause to save Greece. Open your ears to our wise counsels and hold your tongues, and we may yet put things on a better footing.

MAGISTRATE

You put things indeed! Oh! this is too much! The *insolence* of the creatures!

LYSISTRATA

Be still!

MAGISTRATE

May I die a thousand deaths ere I obey one who wears a veil!

LYSISTRATA

If that's all that troubles you, here, take my veil, wrap it round your head, and hold your tongue.

CLEONICÉ

Then take this basket; put on a girdle, card wool, munch beans. The war shall be women's business.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Lay aside your water-pots, we will guard them, we will help our friends and companions.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

For myself, I will never weary of the dance; my knees will never grow stiff with fatigue. I will brave everything with my dear allies, on whom Nature has lavished virtue, grace, boldness, cleverness, and whose wisely directed energy is going to save the State.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Oh! my good, gallant Lysistrata, and all my friends, be ever like a bundle of nettles; never let your anger slacken; the winds of fortune blow our way.

LYSISTRATA

May gentle Love and the sweet Cyprian Queen shower seductive charms on our breasts and our thighs. If only we may stir so amorous a feeling among the men that they stand as firm as sticks, we shall indeed deserve the name of peace-makers among the Greeks.

MAGISTRATE

How will that be, pray?

LYSISTRATA

To begin with, we shall not see you any more running like mad fellows to the Market holding lance in fist.

CLEONICÉ

That will be something gained, anyway, by the Paphian goddess, it will!

LYSISTRATA

Now we see them, mixed up with saucepans and kitchen stuff, armed to the teeth, looking like wild Corybantes!

MAGISTRATE

Why, of course; that's what brave men should do.

LYSISTRATA

Oh! but what a funny sight, to behold a man wearing a Gorgon's-head buckler coming along to buy fish!

CLEONICÉ

The other day in the Market I saw a phylarch with flowing ringlets; he was on horseback, and was pouring into his helmet the broth he had just bought at an old dame's still. There was a Thracian warrior too, who was brandishing his lance like Tereus in the play; he had scared a good woman selling figs into a perfect panic, and was gobbling up all her ripest fruit

MAGISTRATE

And how, pray, would you propose to restore peace and order in all the countries of Greece?

LYSISTRATA

It's the easiest thing in the world!

MAGISTRATE

Come, tell us how; I am curious to know.

LYSISTRATA

When we are winding thread, and it is tangled, we pass the spool across and through the skein, now this way, now that way; even so, to finish off the war, we shall send embassies hither and thither and everywhere, to disentangle matters.

MAGISTRATE

And is it with your yarn, and your skeins, and your spools, you think to appease so many bitter enmities, you silly women?

LYSISTRATA

If only you had common sense, you would always do in politics the same as we do with our yarn.

MAGISTRATE

Come, how is that, eh?

LYSISTRATA

First we wash the yarn to separate the grease and filth; do the same with all bad citizens, sort them out and drive them forth with rods—they're the refuse of the city. Then for all such as come crowding up in search of employments and offices, we must card them thoroughly; then, to bring them all to the same standard, pitch them pell-mell into the same basket, resident aliens or no, allies, debtors to the State, all mixed up together. Then as for our Colonies, you must think of them as so many isolated hanks; find the ends of the separate threads, draw them to a centre here, wind them into one, make one great hank of the lot, out of which the public can weave itself a good, stout tunic.

MAGISTRATE

Is it not a sin and a shame to see them carding and winding the State, these women who have neither art nor part in the burdens of the war?

LYSISTRATA

What! wretched man! why, it's a far heavier burden to us than to you. In the first place, we bear sons who go off to fight far away from Athens.

MAGISTRATE

Enough said! do not recall sad and sorry memories!

LYSISTRATA

Then secondly, instead of enjoying the pleasures of love and making the best of our youth and beauty, we are left to languish far from our husbands, who are all with the army. But say no more of ourselves; what afflicts me is to see our girls growing old in lonely grief.

MAGISTRATE

Don't the men grow old too?

LYSISTRATA

That is not the same thing. When the soldier returns from the wars, even though he has white hair, he very soon finds a young wife. But a woman has only one summer; if she does not make hay while the sun shines, no one will afterwards have anything to say to her, and she spends her days consulting oracles that never send her a husband.

MAGISTRATE

But the old man who can still get an erection . . .

LYSISTRATA

But you, why don't you get done with it and die? You are rich; go buy yourself a bier, and I will knead you a honey-cake for Cerberus. Here, take this garland.

(*Drenching him with water.*)

CLEONICÉ

And this one too.

(*Drenching him with water.*)

MYRRHINÉ

And these fillets.

(*Drenching him with water.*)

LYSISTRATA

What else do you need? Step aboard the boat; Charon is waiting for you, you're keeping him from pushing off.

MAGISTRATE

To treat me so scurvily! What an insult! I will go show myself to my fellow-magistrates just as I am.

LYSISTRATA

What! are you blaming us for not having exposed you according to custom? Nay, console yourself; we will not fail to offer up the third-day sacrifice for you, first thing in the morning.[4]

(*She goes into the Acropolis, with* CLEONICÉ *and* MYRRHINÉ.)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Awake, friends of freedom; let us hold ourselves aye ready to act.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

I suspect a mighty peril; I foresee another tyranny like Hippias'. I am sore afraid the Laconians assembled here with Clisthenes have, by a stratagem of war, stirred up these women, enemies of the gods, to seize upon our treasury and the funds whereby I lived.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Is it not a sin and a shame for them to interfere in advising the citizens, to prate of shields and lances, and to ally themselves with Laconians, fellows I trust no more than I would so many famished wolves? The whole thing, my friends, is nothing else but an attempt to re-establish tyranny. But I will never submit; I will be on my guard for the future; I will always carry a blade hidden under myrtle boughs; I will post myself in the public square under arms, shoulder to shoulder with Aristogiton; and

now, to make a start, I must just break a few of that cursed old jade's teeth yonder.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Nay, never play the brave man, else when you go back home, your own mother won't know you. But, dear friends and allies, first let us lay our burdens down.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

Then, citizens all, hear what I have to say. I have useful counsel to give our city, which deserves it well at my hands for the brilliant distinctions it has lavished on my girlhood. At seven years of age, I carried the sacred vessels; at ten, I pounded barley for the altar of Athené; next, clad in a robe of yellow silk, I played the bear to Artemis at the Brauronia; presently, when I was grown up, a tall, handsome maiden, they put a necklace of dried figs about my neck, and I was one of the Canephori.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

So surely I am bound to give my best advice to Athens. What matters that I was born a woman, if I can cure your misfortunes? I pay my share of tolls and taxes, by giving men to the State. But you, you miserable greybeards, you contribute nothing to the public charges; on the contrary, you have wasted the treasure of our forefathers, as it was called, the treasure amassed in the days of the Persian Wars. You pay nothing at all in return; and into the bargain you endanger our lives and liberties by your mistakes. Have you one word to say for yourselves? . . . Ah! don't irritate me, you there, or I'll lay my slipper across your jaws; and it's pretty heavy.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

Outrage upon outrage! things are going from bad to worse. Let us punish the minxes, every one of us that has balls to boast of. Come, off with our tunics, for a man must savour of manhood; come, my friends, let us strip naked from head to foot. Courage, I say, we who in our day garrisoned Lipsydrion; let us be young again, and shake off eld.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

If we give them the least hold over us, that's the end! their audacity will know no bounds! We shall see them building ships, and fighting sea-fights, like Artemisia; and, if they want to mount and ride as cavalry, we had best cashier the knights, for indeed women excel in riding, and have a fine, firm seat for the gallop. Just think of all those squadrons of Amazons

Micon has painted for us engaged in hand-to-hand combat with men. Come then, we must now fit collars to all these willing necks.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

By the blessed goddesses, if you anger me, I will let loose the beast of my evil passions, and a very hailstorm of blows will set you yelling for help. Come, dames, off with your tunics, and quick's the word; women must smell the smell of women in the throes of passion. . . . Now just you dare to measure strength with me, old greybeard, and I warrant you you'll never eat garlic or black beans any more. No, not a word! my anger is at boiling point, and I'll do with you what the beetle did with the eagle's eggs.[5]

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I laugh at your threats, so long as I have on my side Lampito here, and the noble Theban, my dear Ismenia. . . . Pass decree on decree, you can do us no hurt, you wretch abhorred of all your fellows. Why, only yesterday, on occasion of the feast of Hecaté, I asked my neighbours of Boeotia for one of their daughters for whom my girls have a lively liking —a fine, fat eel to wit; and if they did not refuse, all along of your silly decrees! We shall never cease to suffer the like, till some one gives you a neat trip-up and breaks your neck for you! (*To* LYSISTRATA *as she comes out from the Acropolis*) You, Lysistrata, you who are leader of our glorious enterprise, why do I see you coming towards me with so gloomy an air?

LYSISTRATA

It's the behaviour of these naughty women, it's the female heart and female weakness that so discourage me.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Tell us, tell us, what is it?

LYSISTRATA

I only tell the simple truth.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

What has happened so disconcerting? Come, tell your friends.

LYSISTRATA

Oh! the thing is so hard to tell—yet so impossible to conceal.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Never seek to hide any ill that has befallen our cause.

LYSISTRATA

To blurt it out in a word—we want laying!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Oh! Zeus, oh! Zeus!

LYSISTRATA

What use calling upon Zeus? The thing is even as I say. I cannot stop them any longer from lusting after the men. They are all for deserting. The first I caught was slipping out by the postern gate near the cave of Pan; another was letting herself down by a rope and pulley; a third was busy preparing her escape; while a fourth, perched on a bird's back, was just taking wing for Orsilochus' house, when I seized her by the hair. One and all, they are inventing excuses to be off home. (*Pointing to the gate*) Look! there goes one, trying to get out! Halloa there! whither away so fast?

FIRST WOMAN

I want to go home; I have some Milesian wool in the house, which is getting all eaten up by the worms.

LYSISTRATA

Bah! you and your worms! go back, I say!

FIRST WOMAN

I will return immediately, I swear I will by the two goddesses! I only have just to spread it out on the bed.

LYSISTRATA

You shall not do anything of the kind! I say, you shall not go.

FIRST WOMAN

Must I leave my wool to spoil then?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, if need be.

SECOND WOMAN

Unhappy woman that I am! Alas for my flax! I've left it at home unstript!

LYSISTRATA

So, here's another trying to escape to go home and strip her flax!

SECOND WOMAN

Oh! I swear by the goddess of light, the instant I have put it in condition I will come straight back.

LYSISTRATA

You shall do nothing of the kind! If once you began, others would want to follow suit.

THIRD WOMAN

Oh! goddess divine, Ilithyia, patroness of women in labour, stay, stay the birth, till I have reached a spot less hallowed than Athené's mount! [6]

LYSISTRATA

What mean you by these silly tales?

THIRD WOMAN

I am going to have a child—now, this *minute!*

LYSISTRATA

But you were not pregnant yesterday!

THIRD WOMAN

Well, I am to-day. Oh! let me go in search of the midwife, Lysistrata, quick, quick!

LYSISTRATA

What is this fable you are telling me? (*Feeling her stomach*) Ah! what have you got there so hard?

THIRD WOMAN

A male child.

LYSISTRATA

No, no, by Aphrodité! nothing of the sort! Why, it feels like something hollow—a pot or a kettle. (*Opening her robe*) Oh! you silly creature, if you have not got the sacred helmet of Pallas—and you said you were with child!

THIRD WOMAN

And so I am, by Zeus, I am!

LYSISTRATA

Then why this helmet, pray?

THIRD WOMAN

For fear my pains should seize me in the Acropolis; I mean to lay my eggs in this helmet, as the doves do.

LYSISTRATA

Excuses and pretences every word! the thing's as clear as daylight. Anyway, you must stay here now till the fifth day, your day of purification.

THIRD WOMAN

I cannot sleep any more in the Acropolis, now I have seen the snake that guards the temple.

FOURTH WOMAN

Ah! and those awful owls with their dismal hooting! I cannot get a wink of rest, and I'm just dying of fatigue.

LYSISTRATA

You wicked women, have done with your falsehoods! You want your husbands, that's plain enough. But don't you think they want you just as badly? They are spending dreadful nights, oh! I know that well enough. But hold out, my dears, hold out! A little more patience, and the victory will be ours. An oracle promises us success, if only we remain united. Shall I repeat the words?

THIRD WOMAN

Yes, tell us what the oracle declares.

LYSISTRATA

Silence then! Now—"Whenas the swallows, fleeing before the hoopoes, shall have all flocked together in one place, and shall refrain them from all amorous commerce, then will be the end of all the ills of life; yea, and Zeus, who doth thunder in the skies, shall set above what was erst below . . ."

THIRD WOMAN

What! shall the men be underneath?

LYSISTRATA

"But if dissension do arise among the swallows, and they take wing from the holy temple, it will be said there is never a more wanton bird in all the world."

THIRD WOMAN

Ye gods! the prophecy is clear.

LYSISTRATA

Nay, never let us be cast down by calamity! let us be brave to bear, and go back to our posts. It would be shameful indeed not to trust the promises of the oracle.

(*They all go back into the Acropolis.*)

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

I want to tell you a fable they used to relate to me when I was a little boy. This is it: Once upon a time there was a young man called

Melanion, who hated the thought of marriage so sorely that he fled away to the wilds. So he dwelt in the mountains, wove himself nets, and caught hares. He never, never came back, he had such a horror of women. As chaste as Melanion, we loathe the jades just as much as he did.

AN OLD MAN (*beginning a brief duet with one of the women*)
You dear old woman, I would fain kiss you.

WOMAN
I will set you crying without onions.

OLD MAN
And give you a sound kicking.

WOMAN (*pointing*)
Ah, ha! what a dense forest you have there!

OLD MAN
So was Myronides one of the bushiest of men of this side; his backside was all black, and he terrified his enemies as much as Phormio.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)
I want to tell you a fable too, to match yours about Melanion. Once there was a certain man called Timon, a tough customer, and a whimsical, a true son of the Furies, with a face that seemed to glare out of a thorn-bush. He withdrew from the world because he couldn't abide bad men, after vomiting a thousand curses at them. He had a holy horror of ill-conditioned fellows, but he was mighty tender towards women.

WOMAN (*beginning another duet*)
Suppose I up and broke your jaw for you!

OLD MAN
I am not a bit afraid of you.

WOMAN
Suppose I let fly a good kick at you?

OLD MAN
I should see your thing then.

WOMAN
You would see that, for all my age, it is very well plucked.

LYSISTRATA (*rushing out of the Acropolis*)
Ho there! come quick, come quick!

ONE OF THE WOMEN
What is it? Why these cries?

LYSISTRATA
A man! a man! I see him approaching all afire with the flames of love. Oh! divine Queen of Cyprus, Paphos and Cythera, I pray you still be propitious to our enterprise.

WOMAN
Where is he, this unknown foe?

LYSISTRATA
Over there—beside the Temple of Demeter.

WOMAN
Yes, indeed, I see him; but who is he?

LYSISTRATA
Look, look! do any of you recognize him?

MYRRHINÉ (*joyfully*)
I do, I do! it's my husband Cinesias.

LYSISTRATA
To work then! Be it your task to inflame and torture and torment him. Seductions, caresses, provocations, refusals, try every means! Grant every favour,—always excepting what is forbidden by our oath on the wine-bowl.

MYRRHINÉ
Have no fear, I'll do it.

LYSISTRATA
Well, I shall stay here to help you cajole the man and set his passions aflame. The rest of you withdraw.
(CINESIAS *enters, in obvious and extreme sexual excitement. A slave follows him carrying an infant.*)

CINESIAS
Alas! alas! how I am tortured by spasm and rigid convulsion! Oh! I am racked on the wheel!

LYSISTRATA
Who is this that dares to pass our lines?

CINESIAS

It is I.

LYSISTRATA

What, a man?

CINESIAS

Very much so!

LYSISTRATA

Get out.

CINESIAS

But who are you that thus repulses me?

LYSISTRATA

The sentinel of the day.

CINESIAS

For the gods' sake, call Myrrhiné.

LYSISTRATA

Call Myrrhiné, you say? And who are you?

CINESIAS

I am her husband, Cinesias, son of Paeon.

LYSISTRATA

Ah! good day, my dear friend. Your name is not unknown amongst us. Your wife has it forever on her lips; and she never touches an egg or an apple without saying: "This is for Cinesias."

CINESIAS

Really and truly?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, indeed, by Aphrodité! And if we fall to talking of men, quick your wife declares: "Oh! all the rest, they're good for nothing compared with Cinesias."

CINESIAS

Oh! please, please go and call her to me!

LYSISTRATA

And what will you give me for my trouble?

CINESIAS

Anything I've got, if you like. (*Pointing to the evidence of his condition*) I will give you what I have here!

LYSISTRATA

Well, well, I will tell her to come.

(*She enters the Acropolis.*)

CINESIAS

Quick, oh! be quick! Life has no more charms for me since she left my house. I am sad, sad, when I go indoors; it all seems so empty; my victuals have lost their savour. And all because of this erection that I can't get rid of!

MYRRHINÉ (*to* LYSISTRATA, *over her shoulder*)

I love him, oh! I love him; but he won't let himself be loved. No! I shall not come.

CINESIAS

Myrrhiné, my little darling Myrrhiné, what are you saying? Come down to me quick.

MYRRHINÉ

No indeed, not I.

CINESIAS

I call you, Myrrhiné, Myrrhiné; won't you *please* come?

MYRRHINÉ

Why should you call me? You do not want me.

CINESIAS

Not want you! Why, here I stand, stiff with desire!

MYRRHINÉ

Good-bye.

(*She turns, as if to go.*)

CINESIAS

Oh! Myrrhiné, Myrrhiné, in our child's name, hear me; at any rate hear the child! Little lad, call your mother.

CHILD

Mamma, mamma, mamma!

CINESIAS

There, listen! Don't you pity the poor child? It's six days now you've never washed and never fed the child.

MYRRHINÉ

Poor darling, your father takes mighty little care of you!

CINESIAS

Come down, dearest, come down for the child's sake.

MYRRHINÉ

Ah! what a thing it is to be a mother! Well, well, we must come down, I suppose.

CINESIAS (*as* MYRRHINÉ *approaches*)

Why, how much younger and prettier she looks! And how she looks at me so lovingly! Her cruelty and scorn only redouble my passion.

MYRRHINÉ (*ignoring him; to the child*)

You are as sweet as your father is provoking! Let me kiss you, my treasure, mother's darling!

CINESIAS

Ah! what a bad thing it is to let yourself be led away by other women! Why give me such pain and suffering, and yourself into the bargain?

MYRRHINÉ (*as he is about to embrace her*)

Hands off, sir!

CINESIAS

Everything is going to rack and ruin in the house.

MYRRHINÉ

I don't care.

CINESIAS

But your web that's all being pecked to pieces by the cocks and hens, don't you care for that?

MYRRHINÉ

Precious little.

CINESIAS

And Aphrodité, whose mysteries you have not celebrated for so long? Oh! won't you please come back home?

MYRRHINÉ

No, at least, not till a sound treaty puts an end to the war.

CINESIAS

Well, if you wish it so much, why, we'll make it, your treaty.

MYRRHINÉ

Well and good! When that's done, I will come home. Till then, I am bound by an oath.

CINESIAS

At any rate, lie with me for a little while.

MYRRHINÉ

No, no, no! (*she hesitates*) but just the same I can't say I don't love you.

CINESIAS

You love me? Then why refuse to lie with me, my little girl, my sweet Myrrhiné?

MYRRHINÉ (*pretending to be shocked*)

You must be joking! What, before the child!

CINESIAS (*to the slave*)

Manes, carry the lad home. There, you see, the child is gone; there's nothing to hinder us; won't you lie down now?

MYRRHINÉ

But, miserable man, where, where?

CINESIAS

In the cave of Pan; nothing could be better.

MYRRHINÉ

But how shall I purify myself before going back into the citadel?

CINESIAS

Nothing easier! you can wash at the Clepsydra.

MYRRHINÉ

But my oath? Do you want me to perjure myself?

CINESIAS

I'll take all responsibility; don't worry.

MYRRHINÉ

Well, I'll be off, then, and find a bed for us.

CINESIAS

There's no point in that; surely we can lie on the ground.

MYRRHINÉ

No, no! even though you are bad, I don't like your lying on the bare earth.

(*She goes back into the Acropolis.*)

CINESIAS (*enraptured*)

Ah! how the dear girl loves me!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a cot*)

Come, get to bed quick; I am going to undress. But, oh dear, we must get a mattress.

CINESIAS

A mattress? Oh! no, never mind about that!

MYRRHINÉ

No, by Artemis! lie on the bare sacking? never! That would be squalid.

CINESIAS

Kiss me!

MYRRHINÉ

Wait a minute!

(*She leaves him again.*)

CINESIAS

Good god, hurry up!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a mattress*)

Here is a mattress. Lie down, I am just going to undress. But you've got no pillow.

CINESIAS

I don't want one either!

MYRRHINÉ

But *I* do.

(*She leaves him again.*)

CINESIAS

Oh god, oh god, she treats my tool just like Heracles!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a pillow*)

There, lift your head, dear! (*Wondering what else to tantalize him with; to herself*) Is that all, I wonder?

CINESIAS (*misunderstanding*)

Surely, there's nothing else. Come, my treasure.

MYRRHINÉ

I am just unfastening my girdle. But remember what you promised me about making peace; mind you keep your word.

CINESIAS

Yes, yes, upon my life I will.

MYRRHINÉ

Why, you have no blanket!

CINESIAS

My god, what difference does *that* make? What I want is to make love!

MYRRHINÉ (*going out again*)

Never fear—directly, directly! I'll be back in no time.

CINESIAS

The woman will kill me with her blankets!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a blanket*)

Now, get yourself up.

CINESIAS (*pointing*)

I've got *this* up!

MYRRHINÉ

Wouldn't you like me to scent you?

CINESIAS

No, by Apollo, no, please don't!

MYRRHINÉ

Yes, by Aphrodité, but I will, whether you like it or not.

(*She goes out again.*)

CINESIAS

God, I wish she'd hurry up and get through with all this!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with a flask of perfume*)

Hold out your hand; now rub it in.

CINESIAS

Oh! in Apollo's name, I don't much like the smell of it; but perhaps it will improve when it's well rubbed in. It does not somehow smack of the marriage bed!

MYRRHINÉ

Oh dear! what a scatterbrain I am; if I haven't gone and brought Rhodian perfumes!

CINESIAS

Never mind, dearest, let it go now.

MYRRHINÉ

You don't really *mean* that.

(*She goes.*)

CINESIAS

Damn the man who invented perfumes!

MYRRHINÉ (*coming back with another flask*)

Here, take this bottle.

CINESIAS

I have a better one all ready for you, darling. Come, you provoking creature, to bed with you, and don't bring another thing.

MYRRHINÉ

Coming, coming; I'm just slipping off my shoes. Dear boy, will you vote for peace?

CINESIAS

I'll think about it. (MYRRHINÉ *runs away.*) I'm a dead man, she is killing me! She has gone, and left me in torment! (*in tragic style*) I must have someone to lay, I must! Ah me! the loveliest of women has choused and cheated me. Poor little lad, how am I to give you what you want so badly? Where is Cynalopex? quick, man, get him a nurse, do!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Poor, miserable wretch, baulked in your amorousness! what tortures are yours! Ah! you fill me with pity. Could any man's back and loins stand such a strain. He stands stiff and rigid, and there's never a wench to help him!

CINESIAS

Ye gods in heaven, what pains I suffer!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Well, there it is; it's her doing, that abandoned hussy!

CINESIAS

No, no! rather say that sweetest, dearest darling.

(*He departs.*)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

That dearest darling? no, no, that hussy, say I! Zeus, thou god of the skies, canst not let loose a hurricane, to sweep them all up into the air, and whirl them round, then drop them down crash! and impale them on the point of this man's tool!

(*A Spartan* HERALD *enters; he shows signs of being in the same condition as* CINESIAS.)

HERALD

Say, where shall I find the Senate and the Prytanes? I am bearer of despatches.

(*An Athenian* MAGISTRATE *enters.*)

MAGISTRATE

Are you a man or a Priapus?

HERALD (*with an effort at officiousness*)

Don't be stupid! I am a herald, of course, I swear I am, and I come from Sparta about making peace.

MAGISTRATE (*pointing*)

But look, you are hiding a lance under your clothes, surely.

HERALD (*embarrassed*)

No, nothing of the sort.

MAGISTRATE

Then why do you turn away like that, and hold your cloak out from your body? Have you got swellings in the groin from your journey?

HERALD

By the twin brethren! the man's an old maniac.

MAGISTRATE

But you've got an erection! You lewd fellow!

HERALD

I tell you no! but enough of this foolery.

MAGISTRATE (*pointing*)

Well, what is it you have *there* then?

HERALD

A Lacedaemonian 'skytalé.'

MAGISTRATE

Oh, indeed, a 'skytalé,' is it? Well, well, speak out frankly; I know all about these matters. How are things going at Sparta now?

HERALD

Why, everything is turned upside down at Sparta; and all the allies have erections. We simply must have Pellené.

MAGISTRATE

What is the reason of it all? Is it the god Pan's doing?

HERALD

No, it's all the work of Lampito and the women who are acting at her instigation; they have kicked the men out from between their thighs.

MAGISTRATE

But what are you doing about it?

HERALD

We are at our wits' end; we walk bent double, just as if we were carrying lanterns in a wind. The jades have sworn we shall not so much as touch them till we have all agreed to conclude peace.

MAGISTRATE

Ah! I see now, it's a *general* conspiracy embracing all Greece. Go back to Sparta and bid them send envoys plenipotentiary to treat for peace. I will urge our Senators myself to name plenipotentiaries from us; and to persuade them, why, I will show them my own tool.

HERALD

What could be better? I fly at your command.

(*They go out in opposite directions.*)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

No wild beast is there, no flame of fire, more fierce and untamable than woman; the leopard is less savage and shameless.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

And yet you dare to make war upon me, wretch, when you might have me for your most faithful friend and ally.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Never, never can my hatred cease towards women.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Well, suit yourself. Still I cannot bear to leave you all naked as you are; folks would laugh at you. Come, I am going to put this tunic on you

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

You are right, upon my word! it was only in my confounded fit of rage that I took it off.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Now at any rate you look like a man, and they won't make fun of you. Ah! if you had not offended me so badly, I would take out that nasty insect you have in your eye for you.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah! so that's what was annoying me so! Look, here's a ring, just remove the insect, and show it to me. By Zeus! it has been hurting my eye for a long time now.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Well, I agree, though your manners are not over and above pleasant. Oh! what a huge great gnat! just look! It's from Tricorythus, for sure.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

A thousand thanks! the creature was digging a regular well in my eye; now that it's gone, my tears can flow freely.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I will wipe them for you—bad, naughty man though you are. Now, just one kiss.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

A kiss? certainly not!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Just one, whether you like it or not.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh! those confounded women! how they do cajole us! How true the saying: " 'Tis impossible to live with the baggages, impossible to live without 'em!" Come, let us agree for the future not to regard each other any more as enemies; and to clinch the bargain, let us sing a choric song.

COMBINED CHORUS OF WOMEN AND OLD MEN (*singing*)

We desire, Athenians, to speak ill of no man; but on the contrary to say much good of everyone, and to do the like. We have had enough of misfortunes and calamities. If there is any man or woman who wants a bit of money—two or three minas or so; well, our purse is full. If only peace is concluded, the borrower will not have to pay back. Also I'm inviting to supper a few Carystian friends, who are excellently well qualified. I have still a drop of good soup left, and a

young porker I'm going to kill, and the flesh will be sweet and tender. I shall expect you at my house to-day; but first away to the baths with you, you and your children; then come all of you, ask no one's leave, but walk straight up, as if you were at home; never fear, the door will be . . . shut in your faces!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah! here come the envoys from Sparta with their long flowing beards; why, you would think they wore pigstyes between their thighs. (*Enter the* LACONIAN ENVOYS *afflicted like their herald.*) Hail to you, first of all, Laconians; then tell us how you fare.

LACONIAN ENVOY

No need for many words; you can see what a state we are in.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Alas! the situation grows more and more strained! the intensity of the thing is simply frightful.

LACONIAN ENVOY

It's beyond belief. But to work! summon your Commissioners, and let us patch up the best peace we may.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah! our men too, like wrestlers in the arena, cannot endure a rag over their bellies: it's an athlete's malady, which only exercise can remedy. (*The* MAGISTRATE *returns; he too now has an evident reason to desire peace.*)

MAGISTRATE

Can anybody tell us where Lysistrata is? Surely she will have some compassion on our condition.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*pointing*)

Look! now he has the very same complaint. (*To the* MAGISTRATE) Don't you feel a strong nervous tension in the morning?

MAGISTRATE

Yes, and a dreadful, dreadful torture it is! Unless peace is made very soon, we shall find no recourse but to make love to Clisthenes.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Take my advice, and arrange your clothes as best you can; one of the fellows who mutilated the Hermae might see you.

MAGISTRATE

Right, by Zeus.

(*He endeavours, not too successfully, to conceal his condition.*)

LACONIAN ENVOY

Quite right, by the Dioscuri. There, I will put on my tunic.

MAGISTRATE

Oh! what a terrible state we are in! Greeting to you, Laconian fellow-sufferers.

LACONIAN ENVOY (*addressing one of his countrymen*)

Ah! my boy, what a terrible thing it would have been if these fellows had seen us just now when we were on full stand!

MAGISTRATE

Speak out, Laconians, what is it brings you here?

LACONIAN ENVOY

We have come to treat for peace.

MAGISTRATE

Well said; we are of the same mind. Better call Lysistrata, then; she is the only person who will bring us to terms.

LACONIAN ENVOY

Yes, yes— and Lysistratus into the bargain, if you will.

MAGISTRATE

Needless to call her; she has heard your voices, and here she comes.

(*She comes out of the Acropolis.*)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Hail, boldest and bravest of womankind! The time is come to show yourself in turn uncompromising and conciliatory, exacting and yielding, haughty and condescending. Call up all your skill and artfulness. Lo! the foremost men in Hellas, seduced by your fascinations, are agreed to entrust you with the task of ending their quarrels.

LYSISTRATA

It will be an easy task—if only they refrain from mutual indulgence in masculine love; if they do, I shall know the fact at once. Now, where is the gentle goddess Peace? (*The goddess, in the form of a beautiful nude girl is brought in by the Machine.*) Lead hither the Laconian envoys. But, look you, no roughness or violence; our husbands always behaved so boorishly. Bring them to me with smiles, as women should. If any refuse

to give you his hand, then take hold of his tool. Bring up the Athenians too; you may lead them either way. Laconians, approach; and you, Athenians, on my other side. Now hearken all! I am but a woman; but I have good common sense; Nature has endowed me with discriminating judgment, which I have yet further developed, thanks to the wise teachings of my father and the elders of the city. First I must bring a reproach against you that applies equally to both sides. At Olympia, and Thermopylae, and Delphi, and a score of other places too numerous to mention, you celebrate before the same altars ceremonies common to all Hellenes; yet you go cutting each other's throats, and sacking Hellenic cities, when all the while the barbarian yonder is threatening you! That is my first point.

MAGISTRATE (*devouring the goddess with his eyes*)
Good god, this erection is killing me!

LYSISTRATA
Now it is to you I address myself, Laconians. Have you forgotten how Periclidas, your own countryman, sat a suppliant before our altars? How pale he was in his purple robes! He had come to crave an army of us; it was the time when Messenia was pressing you sore, and the Sea-god was shaking the earth. Cimon marched to your aid at the head of four thousand hoplites, and saved Lacedaemon. And, after such a service as that, you ravage the soil of your benefactors!

MAGISTRATE
They do wrong, very wrong, Lysistrata.

LACONIAN ENVOY
We do wrong, very wrong. (*Looking at the goddess*) Ah! great gods! what a lovely bottom Peace has!

LYSISTRATA
And now a word to the Athenians. Have you no memory left of how, in the days when you wore the tunic of slaves, the Laconians came, spear in hand, and slew a host of Thessalians and partisans of Hippias the tyrant? They, and they only, fought on your side on that eventful day; they delivered you from despotism, and thanks to them our nation could change the short tunic of the slave for the long cloak of the free man.

LACONIAN ENVOY (*looking at* LYSISTRATA)
I have never seen a woman of more gracious dignity.

MAGISTRATE (*looking at* PEACE)
I have never seen a woman with a finer body!

LYSISTRATA

Bound by such ties of mutual kindness, how can you bear to be at war? Stop, stay the hateful strife, be reconciled; what hinders you?

LACONIAN ENVOY

We are quite ready, if they will give us back our rampart.

LYSISTRATA

What rampart, my dear man?

LACONIAN ENVOY

Pylos, which we have been asking for and craving for ever so long.

MAGISTRATE

In the Sea-god's name, you shall never have it!

LYSISTRATA

Agree, my friends, agree.

MAGISTRATE

But then what city shall we be able to stir up trouble in?

LYSISTRATA

Ask for another place in exchange.

MAGISTRATE

Ah! that's the ticket! Well, to begin with, give us Echinus, the Maliac gulf adjoining, and the two legs of Megara.

LACONIAN ENVOY

No, by the Dioscuri, surely not all that, my dear sir.

LYSISTRATA

Come to terms; never make a difficulty of two legs more or less!

MAGISTRATE (*his eye on* PEACE)

Well, I'm ready to strip down and get to work right now.

(*He takes off his mantle.*)

LACONIAN ENVOY (*following out this idea*)

And I also, to dung it to start with.

LYSISTRATA

That's just what you shall do, once peace is signed. So, if you really want to make it, go consult your allies about the matter.

MAGISTRATE

What allies, I should like to know? Why, we are *all* erected; there's no one who is not mad to be mating. What we all want is to be in bed with our wives; how should our allies fail to second our project?

LACONIAN ENVOY

And ours too, for certain sure!

MAGISTRATE

The Carystians first and foremost, by the gods!

LYSISTRATA

Well said, indeed! Now go and purify yourselves for entering the Acropolis, where the women invite you to supper; we will empty our provision baskets to do you honour. At table, you will exchange oaths and pledges; then each man will go home with his wife.

MAGISTRATE

Come along then, and as quick as may be.

LACONIAN ENVOY

Lead on; I'm your man.

MAGISTRATE

Quick, quick's the word, say I.

(*They follow* LYSISTRATA *into the Acropolis.*)

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

Embroidered stuffs, and dainty tunics, and flowing gowns, and golden ornaments, everything I have, I offer them to you with all my heart; take them all for your children, for your girls, in case they are chosen Canephori. I invite you every one to enter, come in and choose whatever you will; there is nothing so well fastened, you cannot break the seals, and carry away the contents. Look about you everywhere . . . you won't find a blessed thing, unless you have sharper eyes than mine. And if any of you lacks corn to feed his slaves and his young and numerous family, why, I have a few grains of wheat at home; let him take what I have to give, a big twelve-pound loaf included. So let my poorer neighbours all come with bags and wallets; my man, Manes, shall give them corn; but I warn them not to come near my door, but—beware the dog!

(*Another* MAGISTRATE *enters, and begins knocking at the gate.*)

SECOND MAGISTRATE

I say, you, open the door! (*To the* WOMEN) Go your way, I tell you. (*As the women sit down in front of the gate*) Why, bless me, they're

sitting down now; I shall have to singe 'em with my torch to make 'em stir! What impudence! I won't take this. Oh, well, if it's absolutely necessary, just to please you, we'll have to take the trouble.

AN ATHENIAN

And I'll share it with you.

(*He brandishes the torch he is carrying and the* CHORUS OF WOMEN *departs. The* CHORUS OF OLD MEN *follows shortly after.*)

SECOND MAGISTRATE

No, no, you must be off—or I'll tear your hair out, I will; be off, I say, and don't annoy the Laconian envoys; they're just coming out from the banquet-hall.

ATHENIAN

Such a merry banquet I've never seen before! The Laconians were simply charming. After the drink is in, why, we're all wise men, every one of us.

MAGISTRATE

It's only natural, to be sure, for sober, we're all fools. Take my advice, my fellow-countrymen, our envoys should always be drunk. We go to Sparta; we enter the city sober; why, we must be picking a quarrel directly. We don't understand what they say to us, we imagine a lot they don't say at all, and we report home all wrong, all topsy-turvy. But, look you, to-day it's quite different; we're enchanted whatever happens; instead of Clitagora, they might sing us Telamon, and we should clap our hands just the same. A perjury or two into the bargain, why! What does that matter to merry companions in their cups?

(*The two* CHORUSES *return.*) But here they are back again! Will you begone, you loafing scoundrels.

(*The* CHORUSES *retire again.*)

ATHENIAN

Ah ha! here's the company coming out already.

(*Two choruses, one Laconian and one Athenian, enter, dancing to the music of flutes; they are followed by the women under the leadership of* LYSISTRATA.)

A LACONIAN

My dear, sweet friend, come, take your flute in hand; I would fain dance and sing my best in honour of the Athenians and our noble selves.

ATHENIAN

Yes, take your flute, in the gods' name. What a delight to see him dance!

LACONIAN (*dancing and singing*)

Oh! Mnemosyné! inspire these men, inspire my muse who knows our exploits and those of the Athenians. With what a god-like ardour did they swoop down at Artemisium on the ships of the Medes! What a glorious victory was that! For the soldiers of Leonidas, they were like fierce boars whetting their tusks. The sweat ran down their faces, and drenched all their limbs, for verily the Persians were as many as the sands of the seashore. Oh! Artemis, huntress queen, whose arrows pierce the denizens of the woods, virgin goddess, be thou favourable to the peace we here conclude; through thee may our hearts be long united! May this treaty draw close for ever the bonds of a happy friendship! No more wiles and stratagems! Aid us, oh! aid us, maiden huntress!

MAGISTRATE

All is for the best; and now, Laconians, take your wives away home with you, and you, Athenians, yours. May husband live happily with wife, and wife with husband. Dance, dance, to celebrate our bliss, and let us be heedful to avoid like mistakes for the future.

CHORUS OF ATHENIANS (*singing*)

Appear, appear, dancers, and the Graces with you! Let us invoke, one and all, Artemis, and her heavenly brother, gracious Apollo, patron of the dance, and Dionysus, whose eye darts flame, as he steps forward surrounded by the Maenad maids, and Zeus, who wields the flashing lightning, and his august, thrice-blessed spouse, the Queen of Heaven! These let us invoke, and all the other gods, calling all the inhabitants of the skies to witness the noble Peace now concluded under the fond auspices of Aphrodité. Io Paean! Io Paean! dance, leap, as in honour of a victory won. *Euoí! Euoí! Euaí! Euaí!*

MAGISTRATE

And you, our Laconian guests, sing us a new and inspiring strain!

LACONIAN (*singing*)

Leave once more, oh! leave once more the noble height of Taygetus, oh! Muse of Lacedaemon, and join us in singing the praises of Apollo of Amyclae, and Athené of the Brazen House, and the gallant twin sons of Tyndareus, who practise arms on the banks of the Eurotas river. Haste, haste hither with nimble-footed pace, let us sing Sparta, the city that delights in choruses divinely sweet and graceful dances, when our maidens bound lightly by the river side, like frolicsome fillies, beating the ground with rapid steps and shaking their long locks in the wind, as Bacchantes wave their wands in

the wild revels of the Wine-god. At their head, oh! chaste and beauteous goddess, daughter of Leto, Artemis, do thou lead the song and dance. With a fillet binding thy waving tresses, appear in thy loveliness; leap like a fawn, strike thy divine hands together to animate the dance, and aid us to renown the valiant goddess of battles, great Athené of the Brazen House!

(*All depart, singing and dancing.*)

NOTES FOR LYSISTRATA

1. This was a constant weakness of Athenian democracy; lacking any sort of centralization it was fatally inefficient in crises.

2. Aristophanes frequently jests on the actual or supposed bibulousness of the Athenian women.

3. The reference is to *The Seven Against Thebes*, 42 ff.

4. This sacrifice was offered to the spirit of the departed on the third day after the funeral.

5. According to the fable the eagle and the beetle were at war; the eagle devoured the beetle's young and the latter retaliated by getting into its nest and tumbling out its eggs. The eagle then complained to Zeus and was advised to lay its eggs in his bosom; the beetle then flew up to the house of Zeus and began buzzing around his ears. When he rose to chase the insect away the eagle's eggs fell to the earth and were smashed to bits.

6. The Acropolis was sacred to Athené, a virgin goddess.

VIII
THE THESMOPHORIAZUSAE

Characters in the Play

Euripides
Mnesilochus, *Father-in-law of Euripides*
Agathon
Servant of Agathon
Herald
Women
Clisthenes
A Magistrate
A Scythian Policeman
Chorus of Thesmophoriazusae—*women celebrating the* Thesmophoria

INTRODUCTION

THE otherwise unfortunate year 411 witnessed the production of two of Aristophanes' comedies, and the exhibition of *Lysistrata* at the Lenaea was supplemented by *The Thesmophoriazusae* at the Great Dionysia two months later. No notice of the prizes awarded at this festival has been preserved, but it is tempting to conjecture and not impossible to believe that the composition of *The Frogs* in 405 was suggested or motivated by a victory of *The Thesmophoriazusae* six years earlier. The detachment from contemporary realities so noteworthy in *The Birds* and clearly recognizable in *Lysistrata* despite a pacifistic theme, is equally characteristic of *The Thesmophoriazusae,* for the subject of the play is essentially literary and has nothing whatever to do with any political or social issues. The ridicule of Euripides, which is the general theme of the comedy, is foreshadowed in *The Acharnians,* but there the target of Aristophanes' gibes is the wretchedness of so many of the dramatist's heroes, and only a part of the play is devoted to it, whereas here it is the tragedian's notorious misogyny that creates the humorous situation, and the whole of the comedy is occupied with this.

When the play opens we find Euripides and his father-in-law Mnesilochus arriving in front of the house of the dramatist Agathon, to seek his assistance in a matter of great importance. The women of Athens have resolved to punish Euripides for the insults to their sex which are so numerous in his tragedies, and his case is to be discussed and decided in their Assembly at the Thesmophoria this very day. Convinced that they will condemn him to death unless there is someone present at the meeting to defend him, he has decided to ask the effeminate Agathon to undertake this office. The latter is soon displayed by the eccyclema, ensconced in his boudoir, but he politely and firmly refuses Euripides' request. Mnesilochus accordingly volunteers to lend whatever assistance he can, and Euripides immediately sets about removing all possible evidences of his relative's masculinity. His face is shaved and his loins singed, and he is then fitted out with a complete set of feminine garments generously loaned by Agathon from his well-stocked wardrobe. Mnesilochus departs for the meeting, making every effort to speak and to act in as womanly a fashion as possible.

The scene shifts to the Thesmophorion, where the debate on Euripides is opened and a speaker recommends that he be put to death. Mnesilochus makes an eloquent and misguided defense of the dramatist, in the course of which he repeatedly insults the fair sex by pointing out how many of their sins have never even been mentioned by his son-in-law. The infuriated Assembly is about to chastise him immediately and violently, when, to make matters worse, the notorious pederast Clisthenes, who has somehow got wind of Euripides' scheme, rushes in and informs the horrified women that there is a man in their midst. An investigation is forthwith made, and Mnesilochus is eventually discovered. Clisthenes departs to report the matter to the magistrates, and the Chorus, or rather its leader, delivers something resembling a parabasis, in which the virtues of men and women are compared, greatly to the advantage of the latter. Formally the passage is highly incomplete, for it contains only the anapests and one epirrheme. Remembering the parabasis in *Peace* we may perhaps conjecture that *The Thesmophoriazusae* was also somewhat hastily composed.

Even before the delivery of the parabasis, Mnesilochus has been energetically racking his brain to discover an effective means of escape, and he has been able to think of nothing better than the device of Oeax in the tragedy *Palamedes*. He accordingly has sent to his son-in-law messages written on wooden statues, in lieu of oars, and flung about in all directions. The ingenious adaptation of the dramatist's artifice is eminently unsuccessful, and as soon as the Chorus leader has completed his delivery of the epirrheme, Mnesilochus adopts another tactic and begins reciting lines from the part of Helen in the recent tragedy of that name. The same curious prank of fortune which had brought her husband to Egypt now summons Euripides to the Thesmophorion, costumed as Menelaus and reciting many of the lines of that fortunate hero. So far all is well, but the more difficult problem of effecting the escape of Mnesilochus remains unsolved, and the arrival of the magistrate to whom Clisthenes has reported the women's plight frustrates the purposes and necessitates the retirement of the wily tragedian. The customary Scythian policeman, whom the magistrate has brought with him, arrests Mnesilochus and binds him to a post, to be, in his feminine attire, a wretched and ridiculous spectacle to the world at large. But Euripides has promised never to abandon him, "so long as one of his numberless artifices remains untried," and Mnesilochus accordingly makes another effort, using the poet's *Andromeda* as the source of his inspiration. He quotes a long and lugubrious lament made by the heroine of that play, and his son-in-law promptly replies from the wings in the rôle of Echo. A ludicrous scene ensues in which Euripides repeats the final word or phrase of everything that is said by his father-in-law or by the Scythian, but this is far from

setting the poor man free, and eventually the dramatist appears as Perseus and seeks to rescue the maiden Mnesilochus; "Each man has his own particular weakness," he says, "as for me I am aflame with love for this virgin." The old man's back is turned and there is no need to untie him; the policeman therefore has no objections to anything that Euripides may wish to do, but the intimation that Mnesilochus is actually to be released elicits prompt and uncompromising opposition. Euripides is now convinced that the refinements of his dramaturgical ingenuity are lost on the torpid barbarian, and he resolves to invent some artifice better adapted to the brutish nature of his opponent. Making his peace with the Chorus by promising never to malign them in the future, he departs to change his costume and almost immediately returns, rather transparently disguised as an old bawd, and bringing with him two girls, a flute-player and a dancer. The Chorus penetrates his disguise without difficulty, but the Scythian is so captivated by the dancing girl that he suspects nothing and is readily induced to go offstage for a while. Euripides quickly releases his father-in-law and takes him home, and the Chorus is obliging enough to start the distressed policeman off in the opposite direction from that in which the pair have departed.

Such is the ending of what is perhaps the best comedy that its author produced. Nowhere else do we find so perfect a blend of animal and intellectual ingredients, embodied in a play so skillfully constructed and so artistically unified; nor is Aristophanes' wit ever so brilliant as it is in *The Thesmophoriazusae*. With it the best decade of the poet's career is brought to a close, and in the three comedies that have survived from the later years we shall never meet quite the same Aristophanes again.

THE THESMOPHORIAZUSAE

(SCENE:—*Behind the orchestra are two buildings, one the house of the poet* AGATHON, *the other the Thesmophorion.* EURIPIDES *enters from the right, at a rapid pace, with an air of searching for something; his father-in-law* MNESILOCHUS, *who is extremely aged, follows him as best he can, with an obviously painful expenditure of effort*)

MNESILOCHUS

GREAT ZEUS! will the swallow never appear to end the winter of my discontent? Why the fellow has kept me on the run ever since early this morning; he wants to kill me, that's certain. Before I lose my spleen entirely, Euripides, can you at least tell me where you are leading me?

EURIPIDES

What need for you to hear what you are going to see?

MNESILOCHUS

How is that? Repeat it. No need for me to hear . . .

EURIPIDES

What you are going to see.

MNESILOCHUS

Nor consequently to see . . .

EURIPIDES

What you have to hear.

MNESILOCHUS

What is this wiseacre stuff you are telling me? I must neither see nor hear?

EURIPIDES

Ah! but you have two things there that are essentially distinct.

MNESILOCHUS

Seeing and hearing?

EURIPIDES

Undoubtedly.

MNESILOCHUS

In what way distinct?

EURIPIDES

In this way. Formerly, when Aether separated the elements and bore the animals that were moving in her bosom, she wished to endow them with sight, and so made the eye round like the sun's disc and bored ears in the form of a funnel.

MNESILOCHUS

And because of this funnel I neither see nor hear. Ah! great gods! I am delighted to know it. What a fine thing it is to talk with wise men!

EURIPIDES

I will teach you many another thing of the sort.

MNESILOCHUS

That's well to know; but first of all I should like to find out how to grow lame, so that I need not have to follow you all about.

EURIPIDES

Come, hear and give heed!

MNESILOCHUS

I'm here and waiting.

EURIPIDES

Do you see that little door?

MNESILOCHUS

Yes, certainly.

EURIPIDES

Silence!

MNESILOCHUS

Silence about what? About the door?

EURIPIDES

Pay attention!

MNESILOCHUS

Pay attention and be silent about the door? Very well.

EURIPIDES

That is where Agathon, the celebrated tragic poet, dwells.

MNESILOCHUS

Who is this Agathon?

EURIPIDES

He's a certain Agathon . . .

MNESILOCHUS

Swarthy, robust of build?

EURIPIDES

No, another.

MNESILOCHUS

I have never seen him. He has a big beard?

EURIPIDES

Have you never *seen* him?

MNESILOCHUS

Never, so far as I know.

EURIPIDES

And yet you have made love to him. Well, it must have been without knowing who he was. (*The door of* AGATHON'S *house opens.*) Ah! let us step aside; here is one of his slaves bringing a brazier and some myrtle branches; no doubt he is going to offer a sacrifice and pray for a happy poetical inspiration for Agathon.

SERVANT OF AGATHON (*standing on the threshold; solemnly*)

Silence! oh, people! keep your mouths sedately shut! The chorus of the Muses is moulding songs at my master's hearth. Let the winds hold their breath in the silent Aether! Let the azure waves cease murmuring on the shore! . . .

MNESILOCHUS

Bombax.[1]

EURIPIDES

Be still! I want to hear what he is saying.

SERVANT

. . . Take your rest, ye winged races, and you, ye savage inhabitants of the woods, cease from your erratic wandering . . .

MNESILOCHUS (*more loudly*)

Bombalobombax.

SERVANT

. . . for Agathon, our master, the sweet-voiced poet, is going . . .

MNESILOCHUS

. . . to be made love to?

SERVANT

Whose voice is that?

MNESILOCHUS

It's the silent Aether.

SERVANT

. . . is going to construct the framework of a drama. He is rounding fresh poetical forms, he is polishing them in the lathe and is welding them; he is hammering out sentences and metaphors; he is working up his subject like soft wax. First he models it and then he casts it in bronze . . .

MNESILOCHUS

. . . and sways his buttocks amorously.

SERVANT

Who is the rustic that approaches this sacred enclosure?

MNESILOCHUS

Take care of yourself and of your sweet-voiced poet! I have a strong tool here both well rounded and well polished, which will pierce your enclosure and penetrate you.

SERVANT

Old man, you must have been a *very* insolent fellow in your youth!

EURIPIDES (*to the* SERVANT)

Let him be, friend, and, quick, go and call Agathon to me.

SERVANT

It's not worth the trouble, for he will soon be here himself. He has started to compose, and in winter it is never possible to round off strophes without coming to the sun to excite the imagination.

EURIPIDES

And what am I to do?

SERVANT

Wait till he gets here.

(*He goes into the house.*)

EURIPIDES

Oh, Zeus! what hast thou in store for me to-day?

MNESILOCHUS

Great gods, what is the matter now? What are you grumbling and groaning for? Tell me; you must not conceal anything from your father-in-law.

EURIPIDES

Some great misfortune is brewing against me.

MNESILOCHUS

What is it?

EURIPIDES

This day will decide whether it is all over with Euripides or not.

MNESILOCHUS

But how? Neither the tribunals nor the Senate are sitting, for it is the third day of the Thesmophoria.

EURIPIDES

That is precisely what makes me tremble; the women have plotted my ruin, and to-day they are to gather in the Temple of Demeter to execute their decision.

MNESILOCHUS

What have they against you?

EURIPIDES

Because I mishandle them in my tragedies.

MNESILOCHUS

By Posidon, you would seem to have thoroughly deserved your fate. But how are you going to get out of the mess?

EURIPIDES

I am going to beg Agathon, the tragic poet, to go to the Thesmophoria.

MNESILOCHUS

And what is he to do there?

EURIPIDES

He would mingle with the women, and stand up for me, if needful.

MNESILOCHUS

Would he be openly present or secretly?

EURIPIDES

Secretly, dressed in woman's clothes.

MNESILOCHUS

That's a clever notion, thoroughly worthy of you. The prize for trickery is ours.

(*The door of* AGATHON'S *house opens.*)

EURIPIDES

Silence!

MNESILOCHUS

What's the matter?

EURIPIDES

Here comes Agathon.

MNESILOCHUS

Where, where?

EURIPIDES

That's the man they are bringing out yonder on the eccyclema.

(AGATHON *appears on the eccyclema, softly reposing on a bed, clothed in a saffron tunic, and surrounded with feminine toilet articles.*)

MNESILOCHUS

I am blind then! I see no man here, I only see Cyrené.

EURIPIDES

Be still! He is getting ready to sing.

MNESILOCHUS

What subtle trill, I wonder, is he going to warble to us?

AGATHON

(*He now sings a selection from one of his tragedies, taking first the part of the leader of the chorus and then that of the whole chorus.*)

(As Leader of the Chorus)

Damsels, with the sacred torch in hand, unite your dance to shouts of joy in honour of the nether goddesses; celebrate the freedom of your country.

(As Chorus)

To what divinity is your homage addressed? I wish to mingle mine with it.

(As Leader of the Chorus)

Oh! Muse! glorify Phoebus with his golden bow, who erected the walls of the city of the Simois.

(As Chorus)

To thee, oh Phoebus, I dedicate my most beauteous songs, to thee, the sacred victor in the poetical contests.

(As Leader of the Chorus)

And praise Artemis too, the maiden huntress, who wanders on the mountains and through the woods . . .

(As Chorus)

I, in my turn, celebrate the everlasting happiness of the chaste Artemis, the mighty daughter of Leto!

(As Leader of the Chorus)

. . . and Leto and the tones of the Asiatic lyre, which wed so well with the dances of the Phrygian Graces.

(As Chorus)

I do honour to the divine Leto and to the lyre, the mother of songs of male and noble strains. The eyes of the goddess sparkle while listening to our enthusiastic chants. Honour to the powerful Phoebus! Hail! thou blessed son of Leto.

Mnesilochus

Oh! ye venerable Genetyllides, what tender and voluptuous songs! They surpass the most lascivious kisses in sweetness; I feel a thrill of delight pass up me as I listen to them. (*To* Euripides) Young man, if you are one, answer my questions, which I am borrowing from Aeschylus' "Lycurgeia." Whence comes this androgyne? What is his country? his dress? What contradictions his life shows! A lyre and a hair-net! A wrestling school oil flask and a girdle! What could be more contradictory? What relation has a mirror to a sword? (*To* Agathon) And you yourself, who are you? Do you pretend to be a man? Where is your tool, pray? Where is the cloak, the footgear that belong to that sex? Are you a

woman? Then where are your breasts? Answer me. But you keep silent. Oh! just as you choose; your songs display your character quite sufficiently.

AGATHON

Old man, old man, I hear the shafts of jealousy whistling by my ears, but they do not hit me. My dress is in harmony with my thoughts. A poet must adopt the nature of his characters. Thus, if he is placing women on the stage, he must contract all their habits in his own person.

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

Then you make love horse-fashion when you are composing a Phaedra.

AGATHON

If the heroes are men, everything in him will be manly. What we don't possess by nature, we must acquire by imitation.

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

When you are staging Satyrs, call me; I will do my best to help you from behind, if I can get my tool up.

AGATHON

Besides, it is bad taste for a poet to be coarse and hairy. Look at the famous Ibycus, at Anacreon of Teos, and at Alcaeus, who handled music so well; they wore head-bands and found pleasure in the lascivious dances of Ionia. And have you not heard what a dandy Phrynichus was and how careful in his dress? For this reason his pieces were also beautiful, for the works of a poet are copied from himself.

MNESILOCHUS

Ah! so it is for this reason that Philocles, who is so hideous, writes hideous pieces; Xenocles, who is malicious, malicious ones, and Theognis, who is cold, such cold ones?

AGATHON

Yes, necessarily and unavoidably; and it is because I knew this that I have so well cared for my person.

MNESILOCHUS

How, in the gods' name?

EURIPIDES

Come, leave off badgering him; I was just the same at his age, when I began to write.

MNESILOCHUS

Ah! then, by Zeus! I don't envy you your fine manners.

EURIPIDES (*to* AGATHON)

But listen to the cause that brings me here.

AGATHON

Say on.

EURIPIDES

Agathon, wise is he who can compress many thoughts into few words. Struck by a most cruel misfortune, I come to you as a suppliant.

AGATHON

What are you asking?

EURIPIDES

The women purpose killing me to-day during the Thesmophoria, because I have dared to speak ill of them.

AGATHON

And what can I do for you in the matter?

EURIPIDES

Everything. Mingle secretly with the women by making yourself pass as one of themselves; then do you plead my cause with your own lips, and I am saved. You, and you alone, are capable of speaking of me worthily.

AGATHON

But why not go and defend yourself?

EURIPIDES

Impossible. First of all, I am known; further, I have white hair and a long beard; whereas you, you are good-looking, charming, and are close-shaven; you are fair, delicate, and have a woman's voice.

AGATHON

Euripides!

EURIPIDES

Well?

AGATHON

Have you not said in one of your pieces, "You love to see the light, and don't you believe your father loves it too?" [2]

EURIPIDES

Yes.

AGATHON

Then never you think I am going to expose myself in your stead; it would be madness. It's up to you to submit to the fate that overtakes you; one must not try to trick misfortune, but resign oneself to it with good grace.

MNESILOCHUS

You fairy! That's why your arse is so accessible to lovers.

EURIPIDES

But what prevents your going there?

AGATHON

I should run more risk than you would.

EURIPIDES

Why?

AGATHON

Why? I should look as if I were wanting to trespass on secret nightly pleasures of the women and to rape their Aphrodité.

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

Wanting to rape indeed! you mean wanting to be raped. Ah! great gods! a fine excuse truly!

EURIPIDES

Well then, do you agree?

AGATHON

Don't count upon it.

EURIPIDES

Oh! I am unfortunate indeed! I am undone!

MNESILOCHUS

Euripides, my friend, my son-in-law, never despair.

EURIPIDES

What can be done?

MNESILOCHUS

Send him to the devil and do with me as you like.

EURIPIDES

Very well then, since you devote yourself to my safety, take off your cloak first.

MNESILOCHUS

There, it lies on the ground. But what do you want to do with me?

EURIPIDES

To shave off this beard of yours, and to remove all your other hair as well.

MNESILOCHUS

Do what you think fit; I yield myself entirely to you.

EURIPIDES

Agathon, you always have razors about you; lend me one.

AGATHON

Take it yourself, there, out of that case.

EURIPIDES

Thanks. (*To* MNESILOCHUS) Now sit down and puff out your right cheek.

MNESILOCHUS (*as he is being shaved*)

Ow! Ow! Ow!

EURIPIDES

What are you shouting for? I'll cram a spit down your gullet, if you're not quiet.

MNESILOCHUS

Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! (*He jumps up and starts running away.*)

EURIPIDES

Where are you running to now?

MNESILOCHUS

To the temple of the Eumenides. No, by Demeter! I won't let myself be gashed like that.

EURIPIDES

But you will get laughed at, with your face half-shaven like that.

MNESILOCHUS

Little care I.

EURIPIDES

In the gods' names, don't leave me in the lurch. Come here.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! by the gods! (*He returns reluctantly and resumes his seat.*)

EURIPIDES

Keep still and hold up your head. Why do you want to fidget about like this?

MNESILOCHUS

Mm, mm.

EURIPIDES

Well! why mm, mm? There! it's done and well done too!

MNESILOCHUS

Alas, I shall fight without armour.

EURIPIDES

Don't worry; you look charming. Do you want to see yourself?

MNESILOCHUS

Yes, I do; hand the mirror here.

EURIPIDES

Do you see yourself?

MNESILOCHUS

But this is not I, it is Clisthenes!

EURIPIDES

Stand up; I am now going to remove your hair. Bend down.

MNESILOCHUS

Alas! alas! they are going to grill me like a pig.

EURIPIDES

Come now, a torch or a lamp! Bend down and watch out for the tender end of your tool!

MNESILOCHUS

Aye, aye! but I'm afire! oh! oh! Water, water, neighbour, or my perineum will be alight!

EURIPIDES

Keep up your courage!

MNESILOCHUS

Keep my courage, when I'm being burnt up?

EURIPIDES

Come, cease your whining, the worst is over.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! it's quite black, all burnt down there!

EURIPIDES

Don't worry! Satyrus will wash it.

MNESILOCHUS

Woe to him who dares to wash me!

EURIPIDES

Agathon, you refuse to devote yourself to helping me; but at any rate lend me a tunic and a belt. You cannot say you have not got them.

AGATHON

Take them and use them as you like; I consent.

MNESILOCHUS

What shall I take?

EURIPIDES

First put on this long saffron-coloured robe.

MNESILOCHUS

By Aphrodité! what a sweet odour! how it smells of young male tools! Hand it to me quickly. And the belt?

EURIPIDES

Here it is.

MNESILOCHUS

Now some rings for my legs.

EURIPIDES

You still want a hair-net and a head-dress.

AGATHON

Here is my night cap.

EURIPIDES

Ah! that's fine.

MNESILOCHUS

Does it suit me?

AGATHON

It could not be better.

EURIPIDES

And a short mantle?

AGATHON

There's one on the couch; take it.

EURIPIDES

He needs slippers.

AGATHON

Here are mine.

MNESILOCHUS

Will they fit me? (*To* AGATHON) You don't like a loose fit.

AGATHON

Try them on. Now that you have all you need, let me be taken inside.
(*The eccyclema turns and* AGATHON *disappears.*)

EURIPIDES

You look for all the world like a woman. But when you talk, take good care to give your voice a woman's tone.

MNESILOCHUS (*falsetto*)

I'll try my best.

EURIPIDES

Come, get yourself to the temple.

MNESILOCHUS

No, by Apollo, not unless you swear to me . . .

EURIPIDES

What?

MNESILOCHUS

. . . that, if anything untoward happen to me, you will leave nothing undone to save me.

EURIPIDES

Very well! I swear it by the Aether, the dwelling-place of the king of the gods.

MNESILOCHUS

Why not rather swear it by the sons of Hippocrates?

EURIPIDES

Come, I swear it by all the gods, both great and small.

MNESILOCHUS

Remember, it's the heart, and not the tongue, that has sworn; [8] for the oaths of the tongue concern me but little.

EURIPIDES

Hurry up! The signal for the meeting has just been raised on the Temple of Demeter. Farewell.

(*They both depart. The scene changes to the interior of the Thesmophorion, where the women who form the chorus are assembled. Mnesilochus enters, in his feminine attire, striving to act as womanly as possible, and giving his voice as female a pitch and lilt as he can; he pretends to be addressing his slave-girl.*)

MNESILOCHUS

Here, Thratta, follow me. Look, Thratta, at the cloud of smoke that arises from all these lighted torches. Ah! beautiful Thesmophorae! grant me your favours, protect me, both within the temple and on my way back! Come, Thratta, put down the basket and take out the cake, which I wish to offer to the two goddesses. Mighty divinity, oh, Demeter, and thou, Persephoné, grant that I may be able to offer you many sacrifices; above all things, grant that I may not be recognized. Would that my well-holed daughter might marry a man as rich as he is foolish and silly, so that she may have nothing to do but amuse herself. But where can a place be found for hearing well? Be off, Thratta, be off; slaves have no right to be present at this gathering.

(*He sits down amongst the women.*)

WOMAN HERALD

Silence! Silence! Pray to the Thesmophorae, Demeter and Cora; pray to Plutus, Calligenia, Curotrophus, the Earth, Hermes and the Graces, that all may happen for the best at this gathering, both for the greatest advantage of Athens and for our own personal happiness! May the award be given her who, by both deeds and words, has most deserved it from the Athenian people and from the women! Address these prayers to heaven and demand happiness for yourselves. Io Paean! Io Paean! Let us rejoice!

CHORUS (*singing*)

May the gods deign to accept our vows and our prayers! Oh! almighty Zeus, and thou, god with the golden lyre, who reignest on sacred Delos, and thou, oh, invincible virgin, Pallas, with the eyes of azure and the spear of gold, who protectest our illustrious city,

and thou, the daughter of the beautiful Leto, queen of the forests, who art adored under many names, hasten hither at my call. Come, thou mighty Posidon, king of the Ocean, leave thy stormy whirlpools of Nereus; come, goddesses of the seas, come, ye nymphs, who wander on the mountains. Let us unite our voices to the sounds of the golden lyre, and may wisdom preside at the gathering of the noble matrons of Athens.

WOMAN HERALD

Address your prayers to the gods and goddesses of Olympus, of Delphi, Delos and all other places; if there be a man who is plotting against the womenfolk or who, to injure them, is proposing peace to Euripides and the Medes, or who aspires to usurping the tyranny, plots the return of a tyrant, or unmasks a supposititious child; or if there be a slave who, a confidential party to a wife's intrigues, reveals them secretly to her husband, or who, entrusted with a message, does not deliver the same faithfully; if there be a lover who fulfils naught of what he has promised a woman, whom he has abused on the strength of his lies; if there be an old woman who seduces the lover of a maiden by dint of her presents and treacherously receives him in her house; if there be a host or hostess who sells false measure, pray the gods that they will overwhelm them with their wrath, both them and their families, and that they may reserve all their favours for you.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Let us ask the fulfilment of these wishes both for the city and for the people, and may the wisest of us cause her opinion to be accepted. But woe to those women who break their oaths, who speculate on the public misfortune, who seek to alter the laws and the decrees, who reveal our secrets to the foe and admit the Medes into our territory so that they may devastate it! I declare them both impious and criminal. Oh! almighty Zeus! see to it that the gods protect us, albeit we are but women!

WOMAN HERALD

Hearken, all of you! this is the decree passed by the Senate of the Women under the presidency of Timoclea and at the suggestion of Sostraté; it is signed by Lysilla, the secretary: "There will be a gathering of the people on the morning of the third day of the Thesmophoria, which is a day of rest for us; the principal business there shall be the punishment that it is meet to inflict upon Euripides for the insults with which he has loaded us." Now who asks to speak?

FIRST WOMAN

I do.

WOMAN HERALD

First put on this garland, and then speak.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Silence! let all be quiet! Pay attention! for here she is spitting as orators generally do before they begin; no doubt she has much to say.

FIRST WOMAN

If I have asked to speak, may the goddesses bear me witness, it was not for sake of ostentation. But I have long been pained to see us women insulted by this Euripides, this son of the green-stuff woman,[4] who loads us with every kind of indignity. Has he not hit us enough, calumniated us sufficiently, wherever there are spectators, tragedians, and a chorus? Does he not style us adulterous, lecherous, bibulous, treacherous, and garrulous? Does he not repeat that we are all vice, that we are the curse of our husbands? So that, directly they come back from the theatre, they look at us doubtfully and go searching every nook, fearing there may be some hidden lover. We can do nothing as we used to, so many are the false ideas which he has instilled into our husbands. Is a woman weaving a garland for herself? It's because she is in love. Does she let some vase drop while going or returning to the house? her husband asks her in whose honour she has broken it: "It can only be for that Corinthian stranger." Is a maiden unwell? Straightway her brother says, "That is a colour that does not please me." [5] And if a childless woman wishes to substitute one, the deceit can no longer be a secret, for the neighbours will insist on being present at her delivery. Formerly the old men married young girls, but they have been so calumniated that none think of them now, thanks to that line of his: "A woman is the tyrant of the old man who marries her." Again, it is because of Euripides that we are incessantly watched, that we are shut up behind bolts and bars, and that dogs are kept to frighten off the adulterers. Let that pass; but formerly it was we who had the care of the food, who fetched the flour from the storeroom, the oil and the wine; we can do it no more. Our husbands now carry little Spartan keys on their persons, made with three notches and full of malice and spite. Formerly it sufficed to purchase a ring marked with the same sign for three obols, to open the most securely sealed-up door; but now this pestilent Euripides has taught men to hang seals of worm-eaten wood about their necks.[6] My opinion, therefore, is that we should rid ourselves of our enemy by poison or by any other means, provided he dies. That is what I announce publicly; as to certain points, which I wish to keep secret, I propose to record them on the secretary's minutes.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Never have I listened to a cleverer or more eloquent woman. Everything she says is true; she has examined the matter from all sides and has weighed up every detail. Her arguments are close, varied, and happily chosen. I believe that Xenocles himself, the son of Carcinus, would seem to talk mere nonsense, if placed beside her.

SECOND WOMAN

I have only a very few words to add, for the last speaker has covered the various points of the indictment; allow me only to tell you what happened to me. My husband died at Cyprus, leaving me five children, whom I had great trouble to bring up by weaving chaplets on the myrtle market. Anyhow, I lived as well as I could until this wretch had persuaded the spectators by his tragedies that there were no gods; since then I have not sold as many chaplets by half. I charge you therefore and exhort you all to punish him, for does he not deserve it in a thousand respects, he who loads you with troubles, who is as coarse toward you as the vegetables upon which his mother reared him? But I must back to the market to weave my chaplets; I have twenty to deliver yet.

CHORUS (*singing*)

This is even more animated and more trenchant than the first speech; all she has just said is full of good sense and to the point; it is clever, clear and well calculated to convince. Yes! we must have striking vengeance on the insults of Euripides.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh, women! I am not astonished at these outbursts of fiery rage; how could your bile not get inflamed against Euripides, who has spoken so ill of you? As for myself, I hate the man, I swear it by my children; it would be madness not to hate him! Yet, let us reflect a little; we are alone and our words will not be repeated outside. Why be so bent on his ruin? Because he has known and shown up two or three of our faults, when we have a thousand? As for myself, not to speak of other women, I have more than one great sin upon my conscience, but this is the blackest of them. I had been married three days and my husband was asleep by my side; I had a lover, who had seduced me when I was seven years old; impelled by his passion, he came scratching at the door; I understood at once he was there and was going down noiselessly. "Where are you going?" asked my husband. "I am suffering terribly with colic," I told him, "and am going to the can." "Go ahead," he replied, and started pounding together juniper berries, aniseed, and sage. As for myself, I moistened the door-hinge and went to find my lover, who laid me, half-reclining upon Apollo's altar and holding on to the sacred laurel with one hand.

Well now! Consider! that is a thing of which Euripides has never spoken. And when we bestow our favours on slaves and muleteers for want of better, does he mention this? And when we eat garlic early in the morning after a night of wantonness, so that our husband, who has been keeping guard upon the city wall, may be reassured by the smell and suspect nothing, has Euripides ever breathed a word of this? Tell me. Neither has he spoken of the woman who spreads open a large cloak before her husband's eyes to make him admire it in full daylight to conceal her lover by so doing and afford him the means of making his escape. I know another, who for ten whole days pretended to be suffering the pains of labour until she had secured a child; the husband hurried in all directions to buy drugs to hasten her deliverance, and meanwhile an old woman brought the infant in a stew-pot; to prevent its crying she had stopped up its mouth with honey. With a sign she told the wife that she was bringing a child for her, who at once began exclaiming, "Go away, friend, go away, I think I am going to be delivered; I can feel him kicking his heels in the belly . . . of the stew-pot." The husband goes off full of joy, and the old wretch quickly takes the honey out of the child's mouth, which starts crying; then she seizes the baby, runs to the father and tells him with a smile on her face, "It's a lion, a lion, that is born to you; it's your very image. Everything about it is like you, even his little tool, curved like the sky." Are these not our everyday tricks? Why certainly, by Artemis, and we are angry with Euripides, who assuredly treats us no worse than we deserve!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Great gods! where has she unearthed all that? What country gave birth to such an audacious woman? Oh! you wretch! I should not have thought ever a one of us could have spoken in public with such impudence. 'Tis clear, however, that we must expect everything and, as the old proverb says, must look beneath every stone, lest it conceal some orator ready to sting us.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There is but one thing in the world worse than a shameless woman, and that's another woman.

FIRST WOMAN

By Aglaurus! you have lost your wits, friends! You must be bewitched to suffer this plague to belch forth insults against us all. Is there no one has any spirit at all? If not, we and our maid-servants will punish her. Run and fetch coals and let's depilate her in proper style, to teach her not to speak ill of her sex.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! no! not that part of me, my friends. Have we not the right to speak frankly at this gathering? And because I have uttered what I thought right in favour of Euripides, do you want to depilate me for my trouble?

FIRST WOMAN

What! we ought not to punish you, who alone have dared to defend the man who has done so much harm, whom it pleases to put all the vile women that ever were upon the stage, who only shows us Melanippés and Phaedras? But of Penelopé he has never said a word, because she was reputed chaste and good.

MNESILOCHUS

I know the reason. It's because not a single Penelopé exists among the women of to-day, but all without exception are Phaedras.

FIRST WOMAN

Women, you hear how this creature still dares to speak of us all.

MNESILOCHUS

And, Heaven knows, I have not said all that I know. Do you want any more?

FIRST WOMAN

You cannot tell us any more; you have crapped out all you know.

MNESILOCHUS

Why, I have not told the thousandth part of what we women do. Have I said how we use the hollow handles of our brooms to draw up wine unbeknown to our husbands?

FIRST WOMAN

The cursed jade!

MNESILOCHUS

And how we give meats to our pimps at the feast of the Apaturia and then accuse the cat . . .

FIRST WOMAN

You're crazy!

MNESILOCHUS

. . . Have I mentioned the woman who killed her husband with a hatchet? Of another, who caused hers to lose his reason with her potions? And of the Acharnian woman . . .

FIRST WOMAN

Die, you bitch!

MNESILOCHUS

. . . who buried her father beneath the bath?

FIRST WOMAN

And yet we listen to such things!

MNESILOCHUS

Have I told how you attributed to yourself the male child your slave had just borne and gave her your little daughter?

FIRST WOMAN

This insult calls for vengeance. Look out for your hair!

MNESILOCHUS

By Zeus! don't touch me.

FIRST WOMAN (*slapping him*)

There!

MNESILOCHUS (*hitting back*)

There! tit for tat!

FIRST WOMAN

Hold my cloak, Philista!

MNESILOCHUS

Come on then, and by Demeter . . .

FIRST WOMAN

Well! what?

MNESILOCHUS

. . . I'll make you crap forth the sesame-cake you have eaten.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Stop wrangling! I see a woman running here in hot haste. Keep silent, so that we may hear the better what she has to say.

(*Enter* CLISTHENES, *dressed as a woman.*)

CLISTHENES

Friends, whom I copy in all things, my hairless chin sufficiently evidences how dear you are to me; I am women-mad and make myself their champion wherever I am. Just now on the market-place I heard mention of a thing that is of the greatest importance to you; I come to tell it to

you, to let you know it, so that you may watch carefully and be on your guard against the danger which threatens you.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What is it, my child? I can well call you child, for you have so smooth a skin.

CLISTHENES

They say that Euripides has sent an old man here to-day, one of his relations . . .

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

With what object? What is his idea?

CLISTHENES

. . . so that he may hear your speeches and inform him of your deliberations and intentions.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But how would a man fail to be recognized amongst women?

CLISTHENES

Euripides singed and depilated him and disguised him as a woman.

MNESILOCHUS

This is pure invention! What man is fool enough to let himself be depilated? As for myself, I don't believe a word of it.

CLISTHENES

Nonsense! I should not have come here to tell you, if I did not know it on indisputable authority.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Great gods! what is it you tell us! Come, women, let us not lose a moment; let us search and rummage everywhere! Where can this man have hidden himself to escape our notice? Help us to look, Clisthenes; we shall thus owe you double thanks, dear friend.

CLISTHENES

Well then! let us see. To begin with you; who are you?

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

Wherever am I to stow myself?

CLISTHENES

Each and every one must pass the scrutiny.

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

Oh! great gods!

FIRST WOMAN

You ask me who I am? I am the wife of Cleonymus.

CLISTHENES (*to the* LEADER OF THE CHORUS)

Do you know this woman?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yes, yes, pass on to the rest.

CLISTHENES

And she who carries the child?

FIRST WOMAN

Surely; she's my nurse.

MNESILOCHUS (*aside*)

This is the end.

(*He runs off.*)

CLISTHENES

Hi! you there! where are you going? Stop. What are you running away for?

MNESILOCHUS (*dancing on one leg*)

I want to take a pee, you brazen thing.

CLISTHENES

Well, be quick about it; I shall wait for you here.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Wait for her and examine her closely; she's the only one we do not know.

CLISTHENES

That's a long leak you're taking.

MNESILOCHUS

God, yes; I am constricted; I ate some cress yesterday.

CLISTHENES

What are you chattering about cress? Come here and be quick.

(*He starts to pull* MNESILOCHUS *back.*)

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! don't pull a poor sick woman about like that.

CLISTHENES (*looking* MNESILOCHUS *square in the eye*)
Tell me, who is your husband?

MNESILOCHUS (*embarrassed*)
My husband? Do you know a certain individual at Cothocidae . . . ?

CLISTHENES
Whom do you mean? Give his name.

MNESILOCHUS
He's an individual to whom the son of a certain individual one day . . .

CLISTHENES
You are drivelling! Let's see, have you ever been here before?

MNESILOCHUS
Why certainly, every year.

CLISTHENES
Who is your tent companion?

MNESILOCHUS
A certain . . . Oh! my god!

CLISTHENES
That's not an answer!

FIRST WOMAN
Withdraw, all of you; I am going to examine her thoroughly about last year's mysteries. But move away, Clisthenes, for no man may hear what is going to be said. Now answer my questions! What was done first?

MNESILOCHUS
Let's see now. What was done first? Oh! we drank.

FIRST WOMAN
And then?

MNESILOCHUS
We drank to our healths.

FIRST WOMAN
You will have heard that from someone. And then?

MNESILOCHUS
Xenylla asked for a cup; there wasn't any thunder-mug.

FIRST WOMAN

You're talking nonsense. Here, Clisthenes, here! This is the man you were telling us about.

CLISTHENES

What shall we do with him?

FIRST WOMAN

Take off his clothes, I can get nothing out of him.

MNESILOCHUS

What! are you going to strip a mother of nine children naked?

CLISTHENES

Come, undo your girdle, you shameless thing.

FIRST WOMAN

Ah! what a sturdy frame! but she has no breasts like we have.

MNESILOCHUS

That's because I'm barren. I never had any children.

FIRST WOMAN

Oh! indeed! just now you were the mother of nine.

CLISTHENES

Stand up straight. What do you keep pushing that thing down for?

FIRST WOMAN (*peering from behind*)

There's no mistaking it.

CLISTHENES (*also peering from behind*)

Where has it gone to now?

FIRST WOMAN

To the front.

CLISTHENES (*from in front*)

No.

FIRST WOMAN (*from behind*)

Ah! it's behind now.

CLISTHENES

Why, friend, it's just like the Isthmus; you keep pulling your stick backwards and forwards more often than the Corinthians do their ships.

FIRST WOMAN

Ah! the wretch! this is why he insulted us and defended Euripides.

MNESILOCHUS

Aye, wretch indeed, what troubles have I not got into now!

FIRST WOMAN

What shall we do?

CLISTHENES

Watch him closely, so that he does not escape. As for me, I'll go to report the matter to the magistrates.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us kindle our lamps; let us go firmly to work and with courage, let us take off our cloaks and search whether some other man has not come here too; let us pass round the whole Pnyx,[7] examine the tents and the passages. Come, be quick, let us start off on a light toe and rummage all round in silence. Let us hasten, let us finish our round as soon as possible.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Look quickly for the traces that might show you a man hidden here, let your glance fall on every side; look well to the right and to the left. If we seize some impious fellow, woe to him! He will know how we punish the outrage, the crime, the sacrilege. The criminal will then acknowledge at last that gods exist; his fate will teach all men that the deities must be revered, that justice must be observed and that they must submit to the sacred laws. If not, then woe to them! Heaven itself will punish sacrilege; being aflame with fury and mad with frenzy, all their deeds will prove to mortals, both men and women, that the deity punishes injustice and impiety, and that she is not slow to strike.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But I think I have now searched everywhere and that no other man is hidden among us.

FIRST WOMAN

Where are you flying to? Stop! stop! Ah! miserable woman that I am, he has torn my child from my breast and has disappeared with it.

MNESILOCHUS

Scream as loud as you will, but you'll never feed him again. If you do not let me go this very instant, I am going to cut open the veins of his thighs with this cutlass and his blood shall flow over the altar.

FIRST WOMAN

Oh! great gods! oh! friends, help me! terrify him with your shrieks, triumph over this monster, permit him not to rob me of my only child.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! oh! venerable Moirai, what fresh attack is this? It's the crowning act of audacity and shamelessness! What has he done now, friends, what has he done?

MNESILOCHUS

Ah! your insolence passes all bounds, but I know how to curb it!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What a shameful deed! the measure of his iniquities is full!

FIRST WOMAN

Aye, it's shameful that he should have robbed me of my child.

CHORUS (*singing*)

It's past belief to be so criminal and so impudent!

MNESILOCHUS (*singing*)

Ah! you're not near the end of it yet.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Little I care whence you come; you shall not return to boast of having acted so odiously with impunity, for you shall be punished.

MNESILOCHUS (*speaking*)

You won't do it, by the gods!

CHORUS (*singing*)

And what immortal would protect you for your crime?

MNESILOCHUS (*speaking*)

You talk in vain! I shall not let go the child.

CHORUS (*singing*)

By the goddesses, you will not laugh presently over your crime and your impious speech. For with impiety, as 'tis meet, shall we reply to your impiety. Soon fortune will turn round and overwhelm you.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come there, bring some firewood. Let's roast the wretch as quickly as we can.

FIRST WOMAN

Bring faggots, Mania! (*To* MNESILOCHUS) You will be nothing but charcoal soon.

MNESILOCHUS

Grill away, roast me, but you, my child, take off this Cretan robe and blame no one but your mother for your death. But what does this mean? The little girl is nothing but a skin filled with wine and shod with Persian slippers. Oh! you wanton, you tippling women, who think of nothing but wine; you are a fortune to the drinking-shops and are our ruin; for the sake of drink, you neglect both your household and your shuttle!

FIRST WOMAN

Faggots, Mania, plenty of them.

MNESILOCHUS

Bring as many as you like. But answer me; are you the mother of this brat?

FIRST WOMAN

I carried it ten months.

MNESILOCHUS

You carried it?

FIRST WOMAN

I swear it by Artemis.

MNESILOCHUS

How much does it hold? Three cotylae? Tell me.

FIRST WOMAN

Oh! what have you done? You have stripped the poor child quite naked, and it is so small, so small.

MNESILOCHUS

So small?

FIRST WOMAN

Yes, quite small, to be sure.

MNESILOCHUS

How old is it? Has it seen the feast of cups thrice or four times?

FIRST WOMAN

It was born about the time of the last Dionysia. But give it back to me.

MNESILOCHUS

No, may Apollo bear me witness.

FIRST WOMAN

Well, then we are going to burn him.

MNESILOCHUS

Burn me, but then I shall rip this open instantly.

FIRST WOMAN

No, no, I adjure you, don't; do anything you like to me rather than that.

MNESILOCHUS

What a tender mother you are; but nevertheless I shall rip it open.

(*He tears open the wine-skin.*)

FIRST WOMAN

Oh, my beloved daughter! Mania, hand me the sacred cup, that I may at least catch the blood of my child.

MNESILOCHUS

Hold it below; that's the only favour I grant you.

(*He pours the wine into the cup.*)

FIRST WOMAN

Out upon you, you pitiless monster!

MNESILOCHUS

This robe belongs to the priestess.

SECOND WOMAN

What belongs to the priestess?

MNESILOCHUS

Here, take it.

(*He throws her the Cretan robe.*)

SECOND WOMAN

Ah! unfortunate Mica! Who has robbed you of your daughter, your beloved child?

FIRST WOMAN

That wretch. But as you are here, watch him well, while I go with Clisthenes to the Magistrates and denounce him for his crimes.

MNESILOCHUS

Ah! how can I secure safety? what device can I hit on? what can I think of? He whose fault it is, he who hurried me into this trouble, will not come to my rescue. Let me see, whom could I best send to him? Ha! I know a means taken from *Palamedes;* like him, I will write my misfortune on some oars, which I will cast into the sea. Where might I find some oars? Hah! what if I took these statues instead of oars, wrote upon them and then threw them towards this side and that. That's the best thing to do. Besides, like oars they are of wood.

(*singing*)

Oh! my hands, keep up your courage, for my safety is at stake. Come, my beautiful tablets, receive the traces of my stylus and be the messengers of my sorry fate. Oh! oh! this R looks miserable enough! Where is it running to then? Come, off with you in all directions, to the right and to the left; and hurry yourselves, for there's much need indeed!

(*He sits down to wait for Euripides. The Chorus turns and faces the audience.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us address ourselves to the spectators to sing our praises, despite the fact that each one says much ill of women. If the men are to be believed, we are a plague to them; through us come all their troubles, quarrels, disputes, sedition, griefs and wars. But if we are truly such a pest, why marry us? Why forbid us to go out or show ourselves at the window? You want to keep this pest, and take a thousand cares to do it. If your wife goes out and you meet her away from the house, you fly into a fury. Ought you not rather to rejoice and give thanks to the gods? for if the pest has disappeared, you will no longer find it at home. If we fall asleep at friends' houses from the fatigue of playing and sporting, each of you comes prowling round the bed to contemplate the features of this pest. If we seat ourselves at the window, each one wants to see the pest, and if we withdraw through modesty, each wants all the more to see the pest perch herself there again. It is thus clear that we are better than you, and the proof of this is easy. Let us find out which is the worse of the two sexes. We say, "It's you," while you aver, "it's we." Come, let us compare them in detail, each individual man with a woman. Charminus is not equal to Nausimaché, that's certain. Cleophon is in every respect inferior to Salabaccho. It's a long time now since any of you has dared to contest the prize with Aristomaché, the heroine of Marathon, or with Stratonicé.

Among the last year's Senators, who have just yielded their office to other citizens, is there one who equals Eubulé? Not even Anytus would

say that. Therefore we maintain that men are greatly our inferiors. You see no woman who has robbed the state of fifty talents rushing about the city in a magnificent chariot; our greatest peculations are a measure of corn, which we steal from our husbands, and even then we return it them the very same day. But we could name many amongst you who do quite as much, and who are, even more than ourselves, gluttons, parasites, cheats and kidnappers of slaves. We know how to keep our property better than you. We still have our cylinders, our beams, our baskets and our sunshades; whereas many among you have lost the wood of your spears as well as the iron, and many others have cast away their bucklers on the battlefield.

There are many reproaches we have the right to bring against men. The most serious is this, that the woman, who has given birth to a useful citizen, whether taxiarch or strategus should receive some distinction; a place of honour should be reserved for her at the Stenia, the Scirophoria, and the other festivals that we keep. On the other hand, she of whom a coward was born or a worthless man, a bad trierarch or an unskilful pilot, should sit with shaven head, behind her sister who had borne a brave man. Oh! citizens! is it just that the mother of Hyperbolus should sit dressed in white and with loosened tresses beside that of Lamachus and lend out money on usury? He, who may have made a deal of this nature with her, so far from paying her interest, should not even repay the capital, saying, "What, pay you interest? after you have given us this delightful son?"

MNESILOCHUS

I have contracted quite a squint by looking round for him, and yet Euripides does not come. Who is keeping him? No doubt he is ashamed of his cold Palamedes. What will attract him? Let us see! By which of his pieces does he set most store? Ah! I'll imitate his Helen, his last-born. I just happen to have a complete woman's outfit.

SECOND WOMAN

What are you ruminating about now? Why are you rolling up your eyes? You'll have no reason to be proud of your Helen, if you don't keep quiet until one of the Magistrates arrives.

MNESILOCHUS (*as Helen*)

"These shores are those of the Nile with the beautiful nymphs, these waters take the place of heaven's rain and fertilize the white earth, that produces the black syrmea."

SECOND WOMAN

By bright Hecaté, you're a cunning varlet.

MNESILOCHUS

"Glorious Sparta is my country and Tyndareus is my father."

SECOND WOMAN

He your father, you rascal! Why, it's Phrynondas.

MNESILOCHUS

"I was given the name of Helen."

SECOND WOMAN

What! you are again becoming a woman, before we have punished you for having pretended it the first time!

MNESILOCHUS

"A thousand warriors have died on my account on the banks of the Scamander."

SECOND WOMAN

Would that you had done the same!

MNESILOCHUS

"And here I am upon these shores; Menelaus, my unhappy husband, does not yet come. Ah! Why do I still live?

SECOND WOMAN

Because of the criminal negligence of the crows!

MNESILOCHUS

"But what sweet hope is this that sets my heart a-throb? Oh, Zeus! grant it may not prove a lying one!"

(EURIPIDES *enters.*)

EURIPIDES (*as Menelaus*)

"To what master does this splendid palace belong? Will he welcome strangers who have been tried on the billows of the sea by storm and shipwreck?"

MNESILOCHUS

"This is the palace of Proteus."

SECOND WOMAN

Of what Proteus? you thriced cursed rascal! how he lies! By the goddesses, it's ten years since Proteas died.

EURIPIDES

"What is this shore whither the wind has driven our boat?"

MNESILOCHUS

" 'Tis Egypt."

EURIPIDES

"Alas! how far we are from own country!"

SECOND WOMAN

Don't believe that cursed fool. This is Demeter's Temple.

EURIPIDES

"Is Proteus in these parts?"

SECOND WOMAN

Ah, now, stranger, it must be sea-sickness that makes you so distraught! You have been told that Proteas is dead, and yet you ask if he is in these parts.

EURIPIDES

"He is no more! Oh! woe! where lie his ashes?"

MNESILOCHUS

" 'Tis on his tomb you see me sitting."

SECOND WOMAN

You call an altar a tomb! Beware of the rope!

EURIPIDES

"And why remain sitting on this tomb, wrapped in this long veil, oh, stranger lady?"

MNESILOCHUS

"They want to force me to marry a son of Proteus."

SECOND WOMAN

Ah! wretch, why tell such shameful lies? Stranger, this is a rascal who has slipped in amongst us women to rob us of our trinkets

MNESILOCHUS (*to* SECOND WOMAN)

"Shout! load me with your insults, for little care I "

EURIPIDES

"Who is the old woman who reviles you, stranger lady?"

MNESILOCHUS

" 'Tis Theonoé, the daughter of Proteus."

SECOND WOMAN

I! Why, my name's Critylle, the daughter of Antitheus, of the deme of Gargettus; as for you, you are a rogue.

MNESILOCHUS

"Your entreaties are vain. Never shall I wed your brother; never shall I betray the faith I owe my husband, Menelaus, who is fighting before Troy."

EURIPIDES

"What are you saying? Turn your face towards me."

MNESILOCHUS

"I dare not; my cheeks show the marks of the insults I have been forced to suffer."

EURIPIDES

"Oh! great gods! I cannot speak, for very emotion. . . . Ah! what do I see? Who are you?"

MNESILOCHUS

"And you, what is your name? for my surprise is as great as yours."

EURIPIDES

"Are you Grecian or born in this country?"

MNESILOCHUS

"I am Grecian. But now your name, what is it?"

EURIPIDES

"Oh! how you resemble Helen!"

MNESILOCHUS

"And you Menelaus, if I can judge by these pot-herbs."[4]

EURIPIDES

"You are not mistaken, 'tis none other than that unfortunate mortal who stands before you."

MNESILOCHUS

"Ah! how you have delayed coming to your wife's arms! Press me to your heart, throw your arms about me, for I wish to cover you with kisses. Carry me away, carry me away, quick, quick, far, very far from here."

SECOND WOMAN

By the goddesses, woe to him who would carry you away! I should thrash him with my torch.

EURIPIDES

"Do you propose to prevent me from taking my wife, the daughter of Tyndareus, to Sparta?"

SECOND WOMAN

You seem to me to be a cunning rascal too; you are in collusion with this man, and it wasn't for nothing that you kept babbling about Egypt. But the hour for punishment has come; here is the Magistrate with his Scythian.

EURIPIDES

This is getting awkward. Let me hide myself.

MNESILOCHUS

And what is to become of me, poor unfortunate man that I am?

EURIPIDES

Don't worry. I shall never abandon you, as long as I draw breath and one of my numberless artifices remains untried.

MNESILOCHUS

The fish has not bitten this time.

(*A* MAGISTRATE *enters, accompanied by a Scythian policeman.*)

MAGISTRATE

Is this the rascal Clisthenes told us about? Why are you trying to make yourself so small? Officer, arrest him, fasten him to the post, then take up your position there and keep guard over him. Let none approach him. A sound lash with your whip for him who attempts to break the order.

SECOND WOMAN

Excellent, for just now a rogue almost took him from me.

MNESILOCHUS

Magistrate, in the name of that hand which you know so well how to bend when money is placed in it, grant me a slight favour before I die.

MAGISTRATE

What favour?

MNESILOCHUS

Order the archer to strip me before lashing me to the post; the crows, when they make their meal on the poor old man, would laugh too much at this robe and head-dress.

MAGISTRATE

It is in that gear that you must be exposed by order of the Senate, so that your crime may be patent to the passers-by.

(*He departs.*)

MNESILOCHUS (*as the* SCYTHIAN *seizes him*)

Oh! cursed robe, the cause of all my misfortune! My last hope is thus destroyed!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us now devote ourselves to the sports which the women are accustomed to celebrate here, when time has again brought round the mighty Mysteries of the great goddesses, the sacred days which Pauson himself honours by fasting and would wish feast to succeed feast, that he might keep them all holy. Spring forward with a light step, whirling in mazy circles; let your hands interlace, let the eager and rapid dancers sway to the music and glance on every side as they move.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Let the chorus sing likewise and praise the Olympian gods in their pious transport. It's wrong to suppose that, because I am a woman and in this temple, I am going to speak ill of men; but since we want something fresh, we are going through the rhythmic steps of the round dance for the first time.

Start off while you sing to the god of the lyre and to the chaste goddess armed with the bow. Hail! thou god who flingest thy darts so far, grant us the victory! The homage of our song is also due to Heré, the goddess of marriage, who interests herself in every chorus and guards the approach to the nuptial couch. I also pray Hermes, the god of the shepherds, and Pan and the beloved Graces to bestow a benevolent smile upon our songs.

Let us lead off anew, let us double our zeal during our solemn days, and especially let us observe a close fast; let us form fresh measures that keep good time, and may our songs resound to the very heavens. Do thou, oh divine Bacchus, who art crowned with ivy, direct our chorus; 'tis to thee that both my hymns and my dances are dedicated; oh, Evius, oh, Bromius, oh, thou son of Semelé, oh, Bacchus, who delightest to mingle with the dear choruses of the nymphs upon the mountains, and who repeatest, while dancing with them, the sacred hymn, *Euios, Euios, Euoi!* Echo, the nymph of Cithaeron, returns thy words, which resound beneath the dark vaults of the thick foliage and in the midst of the rocks of the forest; the ivy enlaces thy brow with its tendrils charged with flowers.

SCYTHIAN (*he speaks with a heavy foreign accent*)
You shall stay here in the open air to wail.

MNESILOCHUS
Archer, I adjure you.

SCYTHIAN
You're wasting your breath.

MNESILOCHUS
Loosen the wedge a little.

SCYTHIAN
Aye, certainly.

MNESILOCHUS
Oh! by the gods! why, you are driving it in tighter.

SCYTHIAN
Is that enough?

MNESILOCHUS
Oh! Oh! Ow! Ow! May the plague take you!

SCYTHIAN
Silence! you cursed old wretch! I am going to get a mat to lie upon, so as to watch you close at hand at my ease.

MNESILOCHUS
Ah! what exquisite pleasures Euripides is securing for me! But, oh, ye gods! oh, Zeus the Deliverer, all is not yet lost! I don't believe him the man to break his word; I just caught sight of him appearing in the form of Perseus, and he told me with a mysterious sign to turn myself into Andromeda. And in truth am I not really bound? It's certain, then, that he is coming to my rescue; for otherwise he would not have steered his flight this way.

(*As Andromeda, singing*)

Oh Nymphs, ye virgins who are so dear to me, how am I to approach him? how can I escape the sight of this Scythian? And Echo, thou who reignest in the inmost recesses of the caves, oh! favour my cause and permit me to approach my spouse. A pitiless ruffian has chained up the most unfortunate of mortal maids. Alas! I had barely escaped the filthy claws of an old fury, when another mischance overtook me! This Scythian does not take his eye off me and he has exposed me as food for the crows. Alas! what is to become of me, alone here and without friends! I am not seen mingling in the dances nor in

the games of my companions, but heavily loaded with fetters I am given over to the voracity of a Glaucetes. Sing no bridal hymn for me, oh women, but rather the hymn of captivity, and in tears. Ah! how I suffer! great gods! how I suffer! Alas! alas! and through my own relatives too! My misery would make Tartarus dissolve into tears! Alas! in my terrible distress, I implore the mortal who first shaved me and depilated me, then dressed me in this long robe, and then sent me to this Temple into the midst of the women, to save me. Oh! thou pitiless Fate! I am then accursed, great gods! Ah! who would not be moved at the sight of the appalling tortures under which I succumb? Would that the blazing shaft of the lightning would wither . . . this barbarian for me! The immortal light has no further charm for my eyes since I have been descending the shortest path to the dead, tied up, strangled, and maddened with pain.

(*In the following scene* EURIPIDES, *from off stage, impersonates Echo.*)

EURIPIDES

Hail! beloved girl. As for your father, Cepheus, who has exposed you in this guise, may the gods annihilate him.

MNESILOCHUS

And who are you whom my misfortunes have moved to pity?

EURIPIDES

I am Echo, the nymph who repeats all she hears. It was I, who last year lent my help to Euripides in this very place. But, my child, give yourself up to the sad laments that belong to your pitiful condition.

MNESILOCHUS

And you will repeat them?

EURIPIDES

I will not fail you. Begin.

MNESILOCHUS (*singing*)

"Oh! thou divine Night! how slowly thy chariot threads its way through the starry vault, across the sacred realms of the Air and mighty Olympus."

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

Mighty Olympus.

MNESILOCHUS (*singing*)

"Why is it necessary that Andromeda should have all the woes for her share?"

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

For her share.

MNESILOCHUS (*speaking*)

"Sad death!"

EURIPIDES

Sad death!

MNESILOCHUS

You weary me, old babbler.

EURIPIDES

Old babbler.

MNESILOCHUS

Oh! you are too unbearable.

EURIPIDES

Unbearable.

MNESILOCHUS

Friend, let me talk by myself. Do please let me. Come, that's enough.

EURIPIDES

That's enough.

MNESILOCHUS

Go and hang yourself!

EURIPIDES

Go and hang yourself!

MNESILOCHUS

What a plague!

EURIPIDES

What a plague!

MNESILOCHUS

Cursed brute!

EURIPIDES

Cursed brute!

MNESILOCHUS

Beware of blows!

EURIPIDES

Beware of blows!

SCYTHIAN

Hullo! what are you jabbering about?

EURIPIDES

What are you jabbering about?

SCYTHIAN

I shall go and call the Magistrates.

EURIPIDES

I shall go and call the Magistrates.

SCYTHIAN

This is odd!

EURIPIDES

This is odd!

SCYTHIAN

Whence comes this voice?

EURIPIDES

Whence comes this voice?

SCYTHIAN

You are mad.

EURIPIDES

You are mad.

SCYTHIAN

Ah! beware!

EURIPIDES

Ah! beware!

SCYTHIAN (*to* MNESILOCHUS)

Are you mocking me?

EURIPIDES

Are you mocking me?

MNESILOCHUS

No, it's this woman, who stands near you.

EURIPIDES

Who stands near you.

SCYTHIAN

Where is the hussy!

MNESILOCHUS

She's running away.

SCYTHIAN

Where are you running to?

EURIPIDES

Where are you running to?

SCYTHIAN

You shall not get away.

EURIPIDES

You shall not get away.

SCYTHIAN

You are chattering still?

EURIPIDES

You are chattering still?

SCYTHIAN

Stop the hussy.

EURIPIDES

Stop the hussy.

SCYTHIAN

What a babbling, cursed woman!

(EURIPIDES *now enters, costumed as Perseus.*)

EURIPIDES

"Oh! ye gods! to what barbarian land has my swift flight taken me? I am Perseus; I cleave the plains of the air with my winged feet, and I am carrying the Gorgon's head to Argos."

SCYTHIAN

What, are you talking about the head of Gorgos, the scribe?

EURIPIDES

No, I am speaking of the head of the Gorgon.

SCYTHIAN

Why, yes! of Gorgos!

EURIPIDES

"But what do I behold? A young maiden, beautiful as the immortals, chained to this rock like a vessel in port?"

MNESILOCHUS

"Take pity on me, oh stranger! I am so unhappy and distraught! Free me from these bonds."

SCYTHIAN

You keep still! a curse upon your impudence! you are going to die, and yet you will be chattering!

EURIPIDES

"Oh! virgin! I take pity on your chains."

SCYTHIAN

But this is no virgin; he's an old rogue, a cheat and a thief.

EURIPIDES

You have lost your wits, Scythian. This is Andromeda, the daughter of Cepheus.

SCYTHIAN (*lifting up* MNESILOCHUS' *robe*)

But look at his tool; it's pretty big.

EURIPIDES

Give me your hand, that I may descend near this young maiden. Each man has his own particular weakness; as for me I am aflame with love for this virgin.

SCYTHIAN

Oh! I'm not jealous; and as he has his arse turned this way, why, I don't care if you make love to him.

EURIPIDES

"Ah! let me release her, and hasten to join her on the bridal couch."

SCYTHIAN

If you are so eager to make the old man, you can bore through the plank, and so get at him.

EURIPIDES

No, I will break his bonds.

SCYTHIAN

Beware of my lash!

EURIPIDES

No matter.

SCYTHIAN

This blade shall cut off your head.

EURIPIDES

"Ah! what can be done? what arguments can I use? This savage will understand nothing! The newest and most cunning fancies are a dead letter to the ignorant. Let us invent some artifice to fit in with his coarse nature."

(*He departs.*)

SCYTHIAN

I can see the rascal is trying to outwit me.

MNESILOCHUS

Ah! Perseus! remember in what condition you are leaving me.

SCYTHIAN

Are you wanting to feel my lash again!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh! Pallas, who art fond of dances, hasten hither at my call. Oh! thou chaste virgin, the protectress of Athens, I call thee in accordance with the sacred rites, thee, whose evident protection we adore and who keepest the keys of our city in thy hands. Do thou appear, thou whose just hatred has overturned our tyrants. The womenfolk are calling thee; hasten hither at their bidding along with Peace, who shall restore the festivals. And ye, august goddesses, display a smiling and propitious countenance to our gaze; come into your sacred grove, the entry to which is forbidden to men; 'tis there in the midst of the sacred orgies that we contemplate your divine features. Come, appear, we pray it of you, oh, venerable Thesmophorae! If you have ever answered our appeal, oh! come into our midst.

(*During this ode the* SCYTHIAN *falls asleep. At the end of it* EURIPIDES *returns, thinly disguised as an old procuress; the* CHORUS *recognizes him, the* SCYTHIAN *does not; he carries a harp, and is followed by a dancing girl and a young flute-girl.*)

EURIPIDES

Women, if you will be reconciled with me, I am willing, and I undertake never to say anything ill of you in future. Those are my proposals for peace.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And what impels you to make these overtures?

EURIPIDES (*to the* CHORUS)

This unfortunate man, who is chained to the post, is my father-in-law; if you will restore him to me, you will have no more cause to complain of me; but if not, I shall reveal your pranks to your husbands when they return from the war.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We accept peace, but there is this barbarian whom you must buy over.

EURIPIDES

I'll take care of that. Come, my little wench, bear in mind what I told you on the road and do it well. Come, go past him and gird up your robe. And you, you little dear, play us the air of a Persian dance.

SCYTHIAN (*waking*)

What is this music that makes me so blithe?

EURIPIDES

Scythian, this young girl is going to practise some dances, which she has to perform at a feast presently.

SCYTHIAN

Very well! let her dance and practise; I won't hinder her. How nimbly she bounds! just like a flea on a fleece.

EURIPIDES

Come, my dear, off with your robe and seat yourself on the Scythian's knee; stretch forth your feet to me, that I may take off your slippers.

SCYTHIAN

Ah! yes, seat yourself, my little girl, ah! yes, to be sure. What a firm little titty! it's just like a turnip.

EURIPIDES (*to the flute-girl*)

An air on the flute, quick! Are you afraid of the Scythian?

SCYTHIAN

What a nice arse! Hold still, won't you? A nice twat, too.

EURIPIDES

That's so! (*To the dancing girl*) Resume your dress, it is time to be going.

SCYTHIAN

Give me a kiss.

EURIPIDES

Come, give him a kiss.

SCYTHIAN

Oh! oh! oh! my god, what soft lips! like Attic honey. But might she not stay with me?

EURIPIDES

Impossible, officer; good evening.

SCYTHIAN

Oh! oh! old woman, do me this pleasure.

EURIPIDES

Will you give a drachma?

SCYTHIAN

Aye, that I will.

EURIPIDES

Hand over the money.

SCYTHIAN

I have not got it, but take my quiver in pledge. I'll bring her back. (*To the dancing girl*) Follow me, my fine young wench. Old woman, you keep an eye on this man. But what's your name?

EURIPIDES

Artemisia.

SCYTHIAN

I'll remember it. Artemuxia.

(*He takes the dancing girl away.*)

EURIPIDES (*aside*)

Hermes, god of cunning, receive my thanks! everything is turning out for the best. (*To the flute-girl*) As for you, friend, go along with them. Now let me loose his bonds. (*To* MNESILOCHUS) And you, directly I have released you, take to your legs and run off full tilt to your home to find your wife and children.

MNESILOCHUS

I shall not fail in that as soon as I am free.

EURIPIDES (*releasing* MNESILOCHUS)

There! It's done. Come, fly, before the Scythian lays his hand on you again.

MNESILOCHUS

That's just what I am doing.

(*Both depart in haste.*)

SCYTHIAN (*returning*)

Ah! old woman! what a charming little girl! Not at all a prude, and so obliging! Eh! where is the old woman? Ah! I am undone! And the old man, where is he? Hi, old woman, old woman! Ah! but this is a dirty trick! Artemuxia! she has tricked me, that's what the little old woman has done! Get clean out of my sight, you cursed quiver! (*Picks it up and throws it across the stage.*) Ha! you are well named quiver, for you have made me quiver indeed. Oh! what's to be done? Where is the old woman then? Artemuxia!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Are you asking for the old woman who carried the lyre?

SCYTHIAN

Yes, yes; have you seen her?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

She has gone that way along with the old man.

SCYTHIAN

Dressed in a long robe?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yes; run quick, and you will overtake them.

SCYTHIAN

Ah! rascally old woman! Which way has she fled? Artemuxia!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Straight on; follow your nose. But, hi! where are you running to now? Come back, you are going exactly the wrong way.

SCYTHIAN

Ye gods! ye gods! and all this while Artemuxia is escaping.

(*He runs off.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Go your way! and a pleasant journey to you! But our sports have lasted long enough; it is time for each of us to be off home; and may the two goddesses reward us for our labours!

1. This ejaculation and its exaggerated form two lines below are probably meant to convey Mnesilochus' mock wonder at the magnificent sounds of Agathon's verses.

2. A quotation from Euripides' *Alcestis* (691).

3. The wretched tragedian was never allowed to forget this infamous line from *Hippolytus* (612).

4. Aristophanes never tires of twitting Euripides with the fact or fancy that his mother had sold vegetables.

5. The implication is that her brother thinks her to be with child.

6. The women would break the seals that their husbands had placed on the doors and then duplicate them on their return; the worm-eaten wood was far more difficult to copy.

7. The women are now speaking as if they were holding a regular popular Assembly, on the Pnyx.

IX
THE FROGS

Characters in the Play

The God Dionysus
Xanthias, *his slave*
Aeschylus
Euripides
Heracles
Pluto
Charon
Aeacus
A Servant of Pluto
A Corpse
A Maidservant of Persephone
A Landlady *in Hades*
Plathané, *her servant*
Chorus of Frogs
Chorus of Initiated Persons

INTRODUCTION

AT the Lenaean festival of 405, six years after the performance of *The Thesmophoriazusae,* Aristophanes produced *The Frogs,* which was awarded the highest prize. The subject of the play is almost wholly literary and its treatment contains astonishingly few passages that can arouse the antipathy of the puritan. It has consequently enjoyed a modern popularity entirely out of proportion to its rather slender merits. Poorly constructed and deficient in wit, it exhibits a solemnity of manner and a thinness of spirit hardly to be expected from the author of *The Birds* and *The Thesmophoriazusae.*

Dionysus, the patron god of tragedy, has deeply mourned the recent death of Euripides, and his nostalgic yearning for the "clever rogue" has finally grown so intense that he has resolved to go down to Hades and bring him back to earth again; the play opens at the commencement of this arduous journey. Since no one but Heracles has ever accomplished such a feat before, Dionysus has acquired a club and slipped a lion's skin over his saffron robe, and in this ludicrous costume he knocks at the house of the very hero he plans to emulate, and obtains advice and directions. With his slave Xanthias accompanying him he soon reaches the Acherusian lake and is ferried across by Charon while the Chorus of Frogs sings lyrics of the rain and the marshes. Xanthias has had to walk around the lake, but he meets his master on the other side, and shortly the real Chorus of the play, composed of initiates into the Mysteries, appears. From them Dionysus learns that he has already reached the house of Pluto, and he knocks at the door. A series of foolish and not overly amusing incidents ensues, in which the costume of Heracles alternately arouses the wrath and elicits the blandishments of the enemies and the friends acquired by that hero on his previous visit to the underworld. The former sort of reception induces Dionysus to place the lion's skin on the shoulders of Xanthias, while the latter causes him quickly to abrogate this arrangement. Eventually they enter the house and the stage is left to the Chorus, which delivers the parabasis.

The ode praises the Athenians and makes a gibe at the demagogue Cleophon. The epirrheme gives the spectators the sound and bold advice

that they should restore the oligarchical revolutionaries of 411 to the rights of citizenship. The antode attacks a little known person by the name of Cligenes, and the antepirrheme compliments the advice of the epirrheme. There are no anapests. The tone of the parabasis is fervently patriotic, and this will doubtless have been the reason for the unique repetition of the play, a few days after its regular performance, in response to popular demand.

At the conclusion of the parabasis Aeacus, the slave of Pluto, and Xanthias emerge from the house and are engaging in friendly conversation, when a great commotion is heard offstage. In this way the poet introduces the famous and lengthy contest between Aeschylus and Euripides which occupies the whole of the latter portion of the comedy. The connection of this with what precedes is so loose that some scholars have been led into the assumption that it was originally composed for an entirely different play and was hurriedly tacked on to the unfinished *Frogs* at the news of the death of Euripides. Dionysus now abandons or forgets the original purpose for which he has come to Hades and announces that the winner of the contest will be the poet whom he will take back to Athens. With their patron god sitting as judge, the two tragedians compare their talents in every department of dramatic art. The fundamental notion of the scene is a happy one, but it is longer than its essential humour allows, and the parodies of Aeschylus are inept and misdirected. The contest is extremely close, and Dionysus experiences great difficulty in arriving at a decision; "My choice shall fall on him my soul desires," he finally says, and we remember that it was his ardent and insatiable craving for Euripides that brought him to the underworld. Thus we are greatly surprised when it turns out to be Aeschylus that he wishes to restore to the light of day. Is this the poet's intent, or is it merely another example of the carelessness with which the play is constructed?

The person and the poetry of Euripides bulk large in the plays of Aristophanes, and the comic poet's attitude toward him has been the subject of much discussion and the cause of many misstatements. It is wholly wide of the mark to speak of him as having *attacked* Euripides; the experiments and the innovations of the restless tragedian provided good material for harmless satire, and his excessive pathos and ingenious intellectualism were obvious targets for gibes, but he is never accused of pederasty or of cowardice, of venality or of sycophancy, nor is it ever suggested that any of the other tragic poets of the time is even remotely to be compared with him. If we will assume Aristophanes to be speaking through the mask of Dionysus in the final scene of *The Frogs,* we must also remember that the god has no easy time choosing Aeschylus, and that it is his deepest and most nostalgic emotions that are ultimately decisive.

THE FROGS

(SCENE:—*In the background are two houses, that of* HERACLES *and that of* PLUTO. *Enter* DIONYSUS, *disguised as* HERACLES, *with lion-skin and club, but with the high boots of tragedy and a tunic of saffron silk. He is followed by* XANTHIAS, *seated on a donkey and carrying an immense bale of luggage on a porter's pole. They advance for a while in silence.*)

XANTHIAS (*looking round at his burden with a groan*)
SIR, shall I say one of the regular things
That people in a theatre always laugh at?

DIONYSUS
Say what you like, except "I'm overloaded."
But mind, not that. That's simply wormwood to me.

XANTHIAS (*disappointed*)
Not anything funny?

DIONYSUS
Not "Oh, my poor blisters!"

XANTHIAS
Suppose I made the great joke?

DIONYSUS
Why, by all means.
Don't be afraid. Only, for mercy's sake,
Don't . . .

XANTHIAS
Don't do what?

DIONYSUS
Don't shift your luggage pole
Across, and say, "I want to blow my nose." [1]

XANTHIAS (*greatly disappointed*)
Nor that I've got such a weight upon my back
That unless some one helps me quickly I shall sneeze?

DIONYSUS
Oh, please, no. Keep it till I need emetics.

XANTHIAS
Then what's the good of carrying all this lumber
If I mayn't make one single good old wheeze
Like Phrynichus, Amipsias, and Lycis?

DIONYSUS
Ah no; don't make them.—When I sit down there
(*Pointing to the auditorium*)
And hear some of those choice products, I go home
A twelvemonth older.

XANTHIAS (*to himself*)
Oh, my poor old neck:
Blistered all round, and mustn't say it's blistered,
Because that's funny!

DIONYSUS
Airs and insolence!
When I, Dionysus, child of the Great Jug,
Must work and walk myself, and have him riding
Lest he should tire himself or carry things!

XANTHIAS
Am I not carrying things?

DIONYSUS
They're carrying you.

XANTHIAS (*showing the baggage*)
I'm carrying this.

DIONYSUS
How?

XANTHIAS
With my back half broken.

DIONYSUS
That bag is clearly carried by a donkey.

XANTHIAS

No donkey carries bags that *I* am carrying.

DIONYSUS

I suppose you know the donkey's carrying *you.*

XANTHIAS (*turning cross*)

I don't. I only know my shoulder's sore!

DIONYSUS

Well, if it does no good to ride the donkey,
Go turns, and let the poor beast ride on you.

XANTHIAS (*aside*)

Just like my luck.—Why wasn't I on board
At Arginusae? " Then I'd let you have it.

DIONYSUS

Dismount, you rascal.—Here's the door close by
Where I must turn in first—and I on foot! (*Knocking.*)
Porter! Hi, porter! Hi!

HERACLES (*entering from the house*)

Who's knocking there?
More like a mad bull butting at the door,
Whoever he is . . . (*seeing* DIONYSUS). God bless us, what's all this?
(*He examines* DIONYSUS *minutely, then chokes with silent emotion.*)

DIONYSUS (*aside to* XANTHIAS)

Boy!

XANTHIAS

What, sir?

DIONYSUS

Did you notice?

XANTHIAS

Notice what?

DIONYSUS

The man's afraid.

XANTHIAS

Yes, sir; (*aside*) afraid you're cracked!

HERACLES (*struggling with laughter*)
I wouldn't if I possibly could help it:
I'm trying to bite my lips, but all the same . . . (*Roars with laughter.*)

DIONYSUS
Don't be absurd! Come here. I want something.

HERACLES
I would, but I can't yet shake this laughter off:
The lion-skin on a robe of saffron silk!
How comes my club to sort with high-heeled boots?
What's the idea? Where have you come from now?

DIONYSUS
I've been at sea, serving with Clisthenes.[1]

HERACLES
You fought a battle?

DIONYSUS
Yes: sank several ships,
Some twelve or thirteen.

HERACLES
Just you two?

DIONYSUS
Of course.

XANTHIAS (*aside*)
And then I woke, and it was all a dream!

DIONYSUS
Well, one day I was sitting there on deck
Reading the *Andromeda,* when all at once
A great desire came knocking at my heart,
You'd hardly think . . .

HERACLES
A great desire? How big?

DIONYSUS
Oh, not so big. Perhaps as large as Molon.

HERACLES
Who was the lady?

DIONYSUS

Lady?

HERACLES

Well, the girl?

DIONYSUS

Great Heaven, there wasn't one!

HERACLES

Well, I have always
Considered Clisthenes a perfect lady!

DIONYSUS

Don't mock me, brother! It's a serious thing,
A passion that has worn me to a shadow.

HERACLES

Well, tell us all about it.

DIONYSUS (*with the despair of an artist explaining himself to a common athlete*)

No; I can't.
You never . . . But I'll think of an analogy.
You never felt a sudden inward craving
For . . . pease-broth?

HERACLES

Pease-broth? Bless me, crowds of times.

DIONYSUS

See'st then the sudden truth? Or shall I put it
Another way?

HERACLES

Oh, not about pease-broth.
I see it quite.

DIONYSUS

Well, I am now consumed
By just that sort of restless craving for
Euripides.

HERACLES

Lord save us, the man's dead!

DIONYSUS

He is; and no one in this world shall stop me
From going to see him!

HERACLES

Down to the place of shades?

DIONYSUS

The place of shades or any shadier still.

HERACLES

What do you want to get?

DIONYSUS

I want a poet,
For most be dead; only the false live on.

HERACLES

Iophon's still alive.

DIONYSUS

Well, there you have it;
The one good thing still left us, if it is one.
For even as to that I have my doubts.

HERACLES

But say, why don't you bring up Sophocles
By preference, if you must have some one back?

DIONYSUS

No, not till I've had Iophon quite alone
And seen what note he gives without his father.
Besides, Euripides, being full of tricks,
Would give the slip to his master, if need were,
And try to escape with me; while Sophocles,
Content with us, will be content in Hell.

HERACLES

And Agathon, where is he?

DIONYSUS

Gone far away,
A poet true, whom many friends regret.

HERACLES

Beshrew him! Where?

DIONYSUS
To feast with peaceful kings!

HERACLES
And Xenocles?

DIONYSUS
Oh, plague take Xenocles!

HERACLES
Pythangelus, then?
(DIONYSUS *shrugs his shoulders in expressive silence.*)

XANTHIAS (*to himself*)
And no one thinks of me,
When all my shoulder's skinning, simply skinning.

HERACLES
But aren't there other pretty fellows there
All writing tragedies by tens of thousands,
And miles verboser than Euripides?

DIONYSUS
Leaves without fruit; trills in the empty air,
And starling chatter, mutilating art!
Give them one chance and that's the end of them,
One weak assault on an unprotected Muse.
Search as you will, you'll find no poet now
With grit in him, to wake a word of power.[4]

HERACLES
How "grit"?

DIONYSUS
The grit that gives them heart to risk
Bold things—vast Ether, residence of God,
Or Time's long foot, or souls that won't take oaths
While tongues go swearing falsely by themselves.

HERACLES
You like that stuff?

DIONYSUS
Like it? I rave about it.

HERACLES (*reflecting*)
Why, yes; it's devilish tricky, as you say.

DIONYSUS

"Ride not upon my soul!" Use your own donkey.

HERACLES (*apologising*)

I only meant it was obviously humbug!

DIONYSUS

If ever I need advice about a *dinner,*
I'll come to you!

XANTHIAS (*to himself*)

And no one thinks of me.

DIONYSUS

But why I came in these especial trappings—
Disguised as you, in fact—was this. I want you
To tell me all the hosts with whom you stayed
That time you went to fetch up Cerberus:
Tell me your hosts, your harbours, bakers' shops,
Inns, taverns—reputable and otherwise—
Springs, roads, towns, posts, and landladies that keep
The fewest fleas.

XANTHIAS (*as before*)

And no one thinks of me!

HERACLES (*impressively*)

Bold man, and will you dare . . .

DIONYSUS

Now, don't begin
That sort of thing; but tell the two of us
What road will take us quickest down to Hades—
And, please, no great extremes of heat or cold!

HERACLES

Well, which one had I better tell you first?—
Which now?—Ah, yes; suppose you got a boatman
To tug you, with a hawser—round your neck . . .

DIONYSUS

A chokey sort of journey, that.

HERACLES

Well, then,
There *is* a short road, quick and smooth, the surface
Well pounded—in a mortar.

DIONYSUS
The hemlock way?

HERACLES
Exactly.

DIONYSUS
Cold and bitter! Why, it freezes
All your shins numb.

HERACLES
Do you mind one short and steep?

DIONYSUS
Not in the least . . . You know I'm no great walker.

HERACLES
Then just stroll down to Ceramicus . . .

DIONYSUS
Well?

HERACLES
Climb up the big tower . . .

DIONYSUS
Good; and then?

HERACLES
Then watch
And see them start the torch-race down below;
Lean over till you hear the men say "Go,"
And then, go.

DIONYSUS
Where?

HERACLES
Why, over.

DIONYSUS
Not for me.
It'd cost me two whole sausage bags of brains.
I won't go that way.

HERACLES
Well, how *will* you go?

DIONYSUS

The way *you* went that time.

HERACLES (*impressively*)

The voyage is long.
You first come to a great mere, fathomless
And very wide.

DIONYSUS (*unimpressed*)

How do I get across?

HERACLES (*with a gesture*)

In a little boat, like that; an aged man
Will row you across the ferry . . . for two obols.[5]

DIONYSUS

Those two old obols, everywhere at work!
I wonder how they found their way down there?

HERACLES

Oh, Theseus took them!—After that you'll see
Snakes and queer monsters, crowds and crowds.

DIONYSUS

Now don't:
Don't play at bogies! You can never move me!

HERACLES

Then deep, deep mire and everlasting filth,
And, wallowing there, such as have wronged a guest,
Or picked a wench's pocket while they kissed her,[6]
Beaten their mothers, smacked their father's jaws,
Or sworn perjurious oaths before high heaven.

DIONYSUS

And with them, I should hope, such as have learned
Cinesias's latest Battle Dance,
Or copied out a speech of Morsimus!

HERACLES

Then you will find a breath about your ears
Of music, and a light before your eyes
Most beautiful—like this—and myrtle groves,
And joyous throngs of women and of men,
And clapping of glad hands.

DIONYSUS
And who will *they* be?

HERACLES
The Initiated.[7]

XANTHIAS (*aside*)
Yes; and I'm the donkey
Holiday-making at the Mysteries!
But I won't stand this weight one moment longer.
(*He begins to put down his bundle.*)

HERACLES
And they will forthwith tell you all you seek.
They have their dwelling just beside the road,
At Pluto's very door.—So now good-bye;
And a pleasant journey, brother.

DIONYSUS
Thanks; good-bye
Take care of yourself. (*To* XANTHIAS, *while* HERACLES *returns into the house*) Take up the bags again.

XANTHIAS
Before I've put them down?

DIONYSUS
Yes, and be quick.

XANTHIAS
No, really, sir; we ought to hire a porter.

DIONYSUS
And what if I can't find one?

XANTHIAS
Then I'll go.

DIONYSUS
All right.—Why, here's a funeral, just in time.
(*Enter a* FUNERAL *on the right.*)
Here, sir—it's you I'm addressing—the defunct;
Do you care to carry a few traps to Hades?

THE CORPSE (*sitting up*)
How heavy?

DIONYSUS

What you see.

CORPSE

You'll pay two drachmas?

DIONYSUS

Oh, come, that's rather much.

CORPSE

Bearers, move on!

DIONYSUS

My good man, wait! See if we can't arrange.

CORPSE

Two drachmas down, or else don't talk to me.

DIONYSUS

Nine obols?

CORPSE (*lying down again*)

Strike me living if I will!

(*Exit the* FUNERAL.)

XANTHIAS

That dog's too proud! He'll come to a bad end.—
Well, I'll be porter.

DIONYSUS

That's a good brave fellow.
(*They walk across the stage.* DIONYSUS *peers into the distance.*)

DIONYSUS

What *is* that?

XANTHIAS

That? A lake.

DIONYSUS

By Zeus, it is!
The mere he spoke of.

XANTHIAS

Yes; I see a boat.

DIONYSUS

Yes, by the powers!

XANTHIAS
And yonder must be Charon.

DIONYSUS
Charon, ahoy!

BOTH
Ahoy! Charon, ahoy!
(CHARON *enters. He is an old, grim, and squalid Ferryman, wearing a slave's felt cap and a sleeveless tunic.*)

CHARON
Who is for rest from sufferings and cares?
Who's for the Carrion Crows, and the Dead Donkeys;
Lethé and Sparta and the rest of Hell?

DIONYSUS
I!

CHARON
Get in.

DIONYSUS
Where do you touch? The Carrion Crows,
You said?

CHARON (*gruffly*)
The Dogs will be the place for you.
Get in.

DIONYSUS
Come, Xanthias.

CHARON
I don't take slaves:
Unless he has won his freedom? Did he fight
The battle of the Cold Meat Unpreserved?

XANTHIAS
Well, no; my eyes were very sore just then [8] . . .

CHARON
Then trot round on your legs!

XANTHIAS
Where shall I meet you?

CHARON
At the Cold Seat beside the Blasting Stone.

DIONYSUS (*to* XANTHIAS, *who hesitates*)
You understand?

XANTHIAS
Oh, quite. (*Aside*) Just like my luck.
What can have crossed me when I started out?
(*Exit* XANTHIAS.)

CHARON
Sit to your oar. (DIONYSUS *does his best to obey*) Any more passengers?
If so, make haste. (*To* DIONYSUS) What are you doing there?

DIONYSUS
Why, what you told me; sitting on my oar.

CHARON
Oh, are you? Well, get up again and sit
(*Pushing him down*)
Down there—fatty!

DIONYSUS (*doing everything wrong*)
Like that?

CHARON
Put out your arms
And stretch . . .

DIONYSUS
Like that?

CHARON
None of your nonsense here!
Put both your feet against the stretcher.—Now,
In good time, row!

DIONYSUS (*fluently, putting down his oars*)
And how do you expect
A man like me, with no experience,
No seamanship, no Salamis,—to row?

CHARON
You'll row all right; as soon as you fall to,
You'll hear a first-rate tune that *makes* you row.

DIONYSUS

Who sings it?

CHARON

Certain cycnoranidae.

That's music!

DIONYSUS

Give the word then, and we'll see.

(CHARON *gives the word for rowing and marks the time. A* CHORUS OF FROGS *is heard off stage.*)

FROGS

O brood of the mere and the spring,
Gather together and sing
From the depths of your throat
By the side of the boat,
Co-ax, as we move in a ring;

As in Limnae we sang the divine
Nyseïan Giver of Wine,
When the people in lots
With their sanctified Pots
Came reeling around my shrine.

Co-ax, co-ax, co-ax,
Brekekekex co-ax.

DIONYSUS

Don't sing any more;
I begin to be sore!

FROGS

Brekekekex co-ax.

Co-ax, co-ax, co-ax,
Brekekekex co-ax!

DIONYSUS

Is it nothing to you
If I'm black and I'm blue?

FROGS

Brekekekex co-ax!

DIONYSUS

A plague on all of your swarming packs.
There's nothing in you except co-ax!

FROGS

Well, and what more do you need?
Though it's none of your business indeed,
When the Muse thereanent
Is entirely content,
And horny-hoof Pan with his reed·

When Apollo is fain to admire
My voice, on account of his lyre
Which he frames with the rushes
And watery bushes—
Co-ax!—which I grow in the mire.

Co-äx, co-äx, co-äx,
Brekekekex co-äx!

DIONYSUS

Peace, musical sisters!
I'm covered with blisters.[9]

FROGS

Brekekekex co-äx.

Co-äx, co-äx, co-äx,
Brekekekex co-äx!
Our song we can double
Without the least trouble·
Brekekekex co-äx.

Sing we now, if ever hopping
Through the sedge and flowering rushes;
In and out the sunshine flopping,
We have sported, rising, dropping,
With our song that nothing hushes.

Sing, if e'er in days of storm
Safe our native oozes bore us,
Staved the rain off, kept us warm,
Till we set our dance in form,
Raised our hubble-bubbling chorus:

Brekekekex co-äx, co-äx!

DIONYSUS

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax!
I can sing it as loud as you.

FROGS

Sisters, that he never must do!

DIONYSUS

Would you have me row till my shoulder cracks?

FROGS

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax!

DIONYSUS

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax!
Groan away till you burst your backs.
It's nothing to me.

FROGS

Just wait till you see.

DIONYSUS

I don't care how you scold.

FROGS

Then all day long
We will croak you a song
As loud as our throat can hold.

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax!!

DIONYSUS

Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax!!
I'll see you don t outdo me in that.

FROGS

Well, *you* shall never beat *us*—that's flat!

DIONYSUS

I'll make you cease your song
If I shout for it all day long,
My lungs I'll tax
With co-ax, co-ax
—I assure you they're thoroughly strong—
Until your efforts at last relax:
Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax!!

(*No answer from the* FROGS.)
Brekekekex co-äx, co-äx!!!
I knew in the end I should stop your quacks!

CHARON
Easy there! Stop her! Lay her alongside.—
Now pay your fare and go.

DIONYSUS (*peering about him*)
There are the obols.
Ho, Xanthias! . . . Where's Xanthias?—Is that you?

XANTHIAS (*from off stage*)
Hullo!

DIONYSUS
Come this way.

XANTHIAS (*entering*)
Oh, I'm glad to see you!

DIONYSUS (*looking round*)
Well, and what have we here?

XANTHIAS
Darkness—and mud.

DIONYSUS
Did you see any of the perjurers here,
And father-beaters, as he said we should?

XANTHIAS
Why, didn't you?

DIONYSUS
I? Lots.
(*Looking full at the audience.*)
I see them now.
Well, what are we to do?

XANTHIAS
Move further on.
This is the place he said was all aswarm
With horrid beasts.

DIONYSUS

A plague on what he said!
Exaggerating just to frighten me,
Because he knew my courage and was jealous.
Naught lives so flown with pride as Heracles!
Why, my best wish would be to meet with something,
Some real adventure, worthy of our travels!

XANTHIAS (*listening*)

Stay!—Yes, upon my word. I hear a noise.

DIONYSUS (*nervously*)

God bless me, where?

XANTHIAS

Behind.

DIONYSUS

Go to the rear.

XANTHIAS

No; it's in front somewhere.

DIONYSUS

Then get in front.

XANTHIAS

Why, there I see it.—Save us!—A great beast. . . .

DIONYSUS (*cowering behind* XANTHIAS)

What like?

XANTHIAS

Horrid! . . . At least it keeps on changing!
It was a bull; now it's a mule; and now
A fair young girl.

DIONYSUS

Where is it? Let me at it!

XANTHIAS

Stay, sir; it's not a girl now, it's a dog.

DIONYSUS

It must be Empusa!

XANTHIAS
Yes. At least its head
Is all on fire.

DIONYSUS
Has it a leg of brass?

XANTHIAS
Yes, that it has. And the other leg of cow-dung.
It's she!

DIONYSUS
Where shall I go?

XANTHIAS
Well, where shall I?

DIONYSUS (*running forward and addressing the Priest of* DIONYSUS *in his seat of state in the centre of the front row of the audience*)
My Priest, protect me and we'll sup together!

XANTHIAS
We're done for, O Lord Heracles.

DIONYSUS (*cowering again*)
Oh, don't!
Don't shout like that, man, and don't breathe that name.

XANTHIAS
Dionysus, then!

DIONYSUS
No, no. That's worse than the other. . . .
Keep on the way you're going.

XANTHIAS (*after searching about*)
Come along, sir.

DIONYSUS
What is it?

XANTHIAS
Don't be afraid, sir. All goes well.
And we can say as said Hegelochus,
"Beyond these storms I catch a *piece* of *tail!*" [10]
Empusa's gone.

DIONYSUS

Swear it.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus, she's gone!

DIONYSUS

Again.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus, she's gone!

DIONYSUS

Your solemn oath.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus!!

DIONYSUS (*raising himself*)

Dear me, that made me feel quite pale.

XANTHIAS (*pointing to the Priest*)

And this kind gentleman turned red for sympathy.

DIONYSUS

How can I have sinned to bring all this upon me?
What power above is bent on my destruction?

XANTHIAS

The residence of God, or Time's long foot?

DIONYSUS (*listening as flute-playing is heard outside*)

I say!

XANTHIAS

What is it?

DIONYSUS

Don't you hear it?

XANTHIAS

What?

DIONYSUS

Flutes blowing.

XANTHIAS

Yes. And such a smell of torches
Floating towards us, all most Mystery-like!

DIONYSUS

Crouch quietly down and let us hear the music.
(*They crouch down at the left. Music is heard far off.* XANTHIAS *puts down the bundle.*)

CHORUS (*unseen*)

Iacchus, O Iacchus!
Iacchus, O Iacchus!

XANTHIAS

That's it, sir. These are the Initiated
Rejoicing somewhere here, just as he told us.
Why, it's the old Iacchus hymn that used
To warm the cockles of Diagoras!

DIONYSUS

Yes, it must be. However, we'd best sit
Quite still and listen, till we're sure of it.
(*There enters gradually the* CHORUS, *consisting of Men Initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries. They are led by a hierophant or Initiating Priest, and accompanied by a throng of Worshipping Women. They have white robes, wreaths upon their brows, and torches in their hands.*)

CHORUS (*singing, off stage*)

Thou that dwellest in the shadow
Of great glory here beside us,
Spirit, Spirit, we have hied us
To thy dancing in the meadow!
Come, Iacchus; let thy brow
Toss its fruited myrtle bough,
We are thine, O happy dancer; O our comrade, come and guide us!
Let the mystic measure beat:
Come in riot fiery fleet;
Free and holy all before thee,
While the Charites adore thee,
And thy Mystae wait the music of thy feet!

XANTHIAS

O Virgin of Demeter, highly blest,
What an entrancing smell of roasted pig! [11]

DIONYSUS

Hush! hold your tongue! Perhaps they'll give you some.

CHORUS (*singing, as they enter*)

Spirit, Spirit, lift the shaken
Splendour of thy tossing torches!
All the meadow flashes, scorches:
Up, Iacchus, and awaken!
Come, thou star that bringest light
To the darkness of our rite,
Till thine old men leap as young men, leap with every thought forsaken
Of the dulness and the fear
Left by many a circling year:
Let thy red light guide the dances
Where thy banded youth advances
To be merry by the blossoms of the mere!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hush, oh hush! for our song begins. Let every one stand aside
Who owns an intellect muddled with sins, or in arts like these untried:
If the mystic rites of the Muses true he has never seen nor sung:
If he never the magical music knew of Cratinus the Bull-eater's tongue:
If he likes in a comedy nothing but riot and meaningless harlequinade:
Or in matters of politics cannot keep quiet and see that cabals be allayed,
But blows up spite and keeps it alight to serve his personal ends:
Or being in power at a critical hour, accepts little gifts from his friends:
Or goes selling a ship, or betraying a fort, or takes to the trade of a smuggler,
Attempting again, in Thorycion's sort,—that pestilent revenue-juggler,—
From Aegina before us to stock Epidaurus with tar and canvas and hide,
Or tries to persuade some friend in the trade for the enemy's ships to provide:
Or a teacher of choirs who forgets his position and damages Hecaté's shrines: [12]
Or the robber of poets, the mere politician, who spites us with pitiful fines [13]
Because we have suitably made him absurd in the God's traditional rhyme:
Behold, I give word: and again give word: and give word for the third, last time:
Make room, all such, for our dance and song.—Up, you, and give us a lay
That is meet for our mirth-making all night long and for this great festival day.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Forth fare all;
This mead's bowers
Bear fresh flowers;
Forth, I call.
Leap, mock, dance, play;
Enough and to spare we have feasted to-day!

March: raise high
Her whose hands
Save these lands;
Raise due cry:
Maid, Maid, save these,
Tho' it may not exactly Thorycion please!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

One hymn to the Maiden; now raise ye another
To the Queen of the Fruits of the Earth
To Demeter the Corn-giver, Goddess and Mother,
Make worship in musical mirth.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Approach, O Queen of orgies pure,
And us, thy faithful band, ensure
From morn to eve to ply secure
Our mocking and our clowning:
To grace thy feast with many a bit
Of merry jest or serious wit,
And laugh, and earn the prize, and flit
Triumphant to the crowning.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*speaking*)

Now call the God of blooming mien; [11]
Raise the mystic chorus:
Our comrade he and guide unseen,
With us and before us.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Iacchus high in glory, thou whose day
Of all is merriest, hither, help our play;
Show, as we throne thee at thy Maiden's side,
How light to thee are our long leagues of way.
Iacchus, happy dancer, be our guide.

Thyself, that poorest men thy joy should share,
Didst rend thy robe, thy royal sandal tear,
That feet unshod might dance, and robes rent wide
Wave in thy revel with no after care.
Iacchus, happy dancer, be our guide.

Lo there! but now across the dance apace
A maiden tripped, a maiden fair of face,
Whose tattered smock and kerchief scarce could hide
The merry bosom peering from its place.
Iacchus, happy dancer, be our guide.

XANTHIAS (*singing*)
I always liked to follow some one else:
Suppose we join and dance?

DIONYSUS (*singing*)
Why, so say I.

(*They join the dance.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*singing*)
Perhaps 'twill best beseem us
To deal with Archedemus,
Who is toothless still and rootless, at seven years from birth:

Yet he leads the public preachers
Of those poor dead upper creatures,
And is prince of all the shadiness on earth!

And Clisthenes, says rumour,
In a wild despairing humour
Sits huddled up and tearing out his hair among the graves.

To believe he would incline us
That a person named Sebinus
Is tossing yet unburied on the waves!

While Callias, says tattle,
Has attended a sea-battle,
And lionesses' scalps were the uniform he wore! [15]

DIONYSUS (*singing*)
You'd oblige us much by telling
Me the way to Pluto's dwelling.
We are strangers newly lighted on your shore.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*singing*)
No need of distant travel
That problem to unravel;
For know that while you ask me, you are standing at the door.

DIONYSUS (*singing*)
Then up, my lad, be packing!

XANTHIAS (*singing*)
There's the Devil in the sacking:
It can't stay still a second on the floor!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*speaking*)
Now onward through Demeter's ring
Through the leaves and flowers,
All who love her junketing,
All who know her powers!
Fare forward you, while I go here
With matron and with maiden,
To make their night-long roaming clear
With tossing torches laden.

CHORUS (*singing*)
Then on 'mid the meadows deep,
Where thickest the rosebuds creep
And the dewdrops are pearliest:
A jubilant step advance
In our own, our eternal dance,
Till its joy the Glad Fates entrance
Who threaded it earliest.

For ours is the sunshine bright,
Yea, ours is the joy of light
All pure, without danger:
For we thine Elect have been,
Thy secrets our eyes have seen,
And our hearts we have guarded clean
Toward kinsman and stranger!
(*The* CHORUS *lines up on one side of the Orchestra.*)

DIONYSUS (*approaching the door of Pluto's house*)
I ought by rights to knock; but how, I wonder.
I don't know how they do knock in this country.

XANTHIAS

Oh, don't waste time. Go in and do your best,
Like Heracles in heart as well as garb.

DIONYSUS (*knocking*)

Ho there!

(*The door opens and a Porter appears, whose dress shows him to be* AEACUS, *the Judge of the Dead.*)

AEACUS

Who summons?

DIONYSUS

Heracles the Brave.

AEACUS

Thou rash, impure, and most abandoned man,
Foul, inly foul, yea foulest upon earth,
Who harried our dog, Cerberus, choked him dumb,
Fled, vanished, and left me to bear the blame,
Who kept him!—Now I have thee on the hip!
So close the black encaverned rocks of Styx
And Acheronian crags a-drip with blood
Surround thee, and Cocytus' circling hounds,
And the hundred-headed serpent, that shall rend
Thy bowels asunder; to thy lungs shall cleave
The lamprey of Tartessus, and thy reins
And inmost entrails in one paste of gore
Tithrasian Gorgons gorge for evermore!
—To whom, even now, I speed my indignant course!

(*The Porter retires.*)

DIONYSUS (*who has fallen prostrate*)

Please! [16]

XANTHIAS

What's the matter? Quick, get up again
Before they come and see you.

DIONYSUS

But I feel
Faint.—Put a cold wet sponge against my heart.

XANTHIAS (*producing a sponge*)

There; you apply it.

DIONYSUS
Thanks. Where is it?

XANTHIAS
There.
(DIONYSUS *takes and applies it.*)
Ye golden gods, is it there you keep your heart?

DIONYSUS
The nervous shock made it go down and down!

XANTHIAS
You *are* the greatest coward I ever saw,
Of gods or humans!

DIONYSUS
I a coward?—I had
The presence of mind to ask you for a sponge.
Few had done more!

XANTHIAS
Could any one do less?

DIONYSUS
A coward would still be flat there, sniffing salts;
I rose, called for a sponge, and used the sponge.

XANTHIAS
That *was* brave, by Poseidon!

DIONYSUS
I should think so.—
And weren't *you* frightened at his awful threats
And language?

XANTHIAS
I? I never cared a rap.

DIONYSUS
Oh, you're a hero, aren't you?—and want glory.
Well, you be *me!* Put on this lion's hide
And take the club—if you're so dauntless-hearted.
I'll take my turn, and be your luggage-boy.

XANTHIAS
Over with both of them! Of course I will.
(*He proceeds to put on the lion-skin.*)

Now watch if Xanthias-Heracles turns faint,
Or shows the same "presence of mind," as you.

DIONYSUS

The true Melitean jail-bird, on my life! . . .
Well, I suppose I'd better take the luggage.
(*The exchange is just effected when the door again opens and there enters a* MAID OF PERSEPHONÉ.)

MAID

Dear Heracles, and is it you once more?
Come in! No sooner did my mistress learn
Your coming, than she set her bread to bake,
Set pots of split-pea porridge, two or three,
A-boiling, a whole ox upon the coals,
Cakes in the oven, and big buns.—Oh, come in.

XANTHIAS (*as* HERACLES)

She is very kind; perhaps some other time.

MAID

Oh, really; but I mustn't let you go!
She's doing everything herself! Braised game,
Spices and fruits and stoups of the sweetest wine—
Come in with me.

XANTHIAS

Most kind, but . . .

MAID

No excuses.
I won't let go —A flute-player, very pretty,
Is waiting for you, and two or three such sweet
Young dancing girls

XANTHIAS (*wavering*)

Did you say dancing girls?

MAID

Yes. Do come in.—They just were going to serve
The fish, and have the table lifted in.

XANTHIAS

I will! I'll chance it!—Go straight in and tell
Those dancing girls that Heracles is coming!
(*The* MAID *retires again.*)
Here, boy, take up the bags and follow me.

DIONYSUS

Stop, please!—You didn't take it seriously
When I just dressed you as Heracles for fun?
You can't be so ridiculous, Xanthias.
Take up the bags at once and bring them in.

XANTHIAS

What? Surely you don't mean to take away
Your own gift?

DIONYSUS

Mean it? No; I'm doing it!
Off with that lion-skin, quick.
(*Begins to strip off the lion-skin by force.*)

XANTHIAS

Help! I'm assaulted . . .
(*Giving way.*)
I leave it with the Gods!

DIONYSUS (*proceeding to dress himself again*)

The Gods, indeed!
What senseless vanity to expect to be
Alcmena's son, a mortal and a slave!

XANTHIAS

Well, take it. I don't care.—The time may be,
God willing, when you'll feel the need of me!

CHORUS (*singing*)

That's the way such points to settle,
Like a chief of tested mettle,
  Weather-worn on many seas,
Not in one fixed pattern stopping,
Like a painted thing, but dropping
  Always towards the side of ease.
'Tis this instinct for soft places,
  To keep warm while others freeze,
Marks a man of gifts and graces,
  Like our own Theramenes!

DIONYSUS (*singing*)

Surely 'twould the matter worsen,
If I saw this low-bred person
  On his cushions sprawling, so,

Served him drinking, watched him winking: [17]—
If he knew what I was thinking—
And he would, for certain, know,
Being a mighty shrewd deviser
Of such fancies—with a blow
P'raps he'd loosen an incisor
From the forefront of my row!

(*During this song there has entered along the street a* LANDLADY, *who is soon followed by her servant,* PLATHANÉ.)

LANDLADY

Ho, Plathané, here, I want you, Plathané! . . .
Here is that scamp who came to the inn before,
Ate sixteen loaves of bread. . . .

PLATHANÉ

Why, so it is:
The very man!

XANTHIAS (*aside*)

Here's fun for somebody.

LANDLADY

And twenty plates of boiled meat, half an obol
At every gulp!

XANTHIAS (*aside*)

Some one'll catch it now!

LANDLADY

And all that garlic.

DIONYSUS

Nonsense, my good woman,
You don't know what you're saying.

PLATHANÉ

Did you think
I wouldn't know you in those high-heeled boots?

LANDLADY

And all the salt-fish I've not mentioned yet. . . .

PLATHANÉ (*to* LANDLADY)

No, you poor thing; and all the good fresh cheese
The man kept swallowing, and the baskets with it!

LANDLADY (*to* XANTHIAS)
And when he saw me coming for the money
Glared like a wild bull! Yes, and roared at me!

XANTHIAS
Just what he does! His manners everywhere.

LANDLADY
Tugged at his sword! Pretended to be mad!

PLATHANÉ
Yes, you poor thing; I don't know how you bore it!

LANDLADY
And we got all of a tremble, both of us,
And ran up the ladder to the loft! And he,
He tore the matting up—and off he went!

XANTHIAS
Like him, again.

PLATHANÉ
But something must be done!

LANDLADY (*to* PLATHANÉ)
Run, you, and fetch me my protector, Cleon.

PLATHANÉ (*to the* LANDLADY, *as they run excitedly to go off in different directions*)
And you fetch me Hyperbolus, if you meet him. . . .
Then we shall crush him!

LANDLADY (*returning*)
Oh, that ugly jaw!
If I could throw a stone, I'd like to break
Those wicked teeth that ground my larder dry!

PLATHANÉ (*returning on the other side*)
And I should like to fling you in the pit!

LANDLADY (*turning again as she goes off*)
And I should like to get a scythe, and cut
That throat that swallowed all my sausages.

PLATHANÉ (*the same*)
Well, I'll go straight to Cleon, and this same day
We'll worm them out in a law-court, come what may!
(*The* LANDLADY *and* PLATHANÉ *go off in different directions.*)

DIONYSUS

Plague take me! No friend left me in the world. . . .
Except old Xanthias!

XANTHIAS

I know, I know!
We all see what you want. But that's enough!
I won't be Heracles.

DIONYSUS

Now don't say that,
Xanthias—old boy!

XANTHIAS

And how am I to be
Alcmena's son—a mortal and a slave?

DIONYSUS

I know you're angry, and quite justly so.
Hit me if you like; I won't say one word back.
But, mark, if ever again in this wide world
I rob you of these clothes, destruction fall
On me myself, my wife, my little ones,—
And, if you like, on the old bat Archedemus!

XANTHIAS

That oath will do. I take it on those terms.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Now 'tis yours to make repayment
For the honour of this raiment,
  Wear it well, as erst you wore,
If it needs some renovating,
Think of whom you're personating,
  Glare like Heracles and roar.
Else, if any fear you show, sir,
  Any weakness at the core,
Any jesting, back you go, sir,
  To the baggage as before!

XANTHIAS (*singing*)

Thank you for your kind intention,
But I had some comprehension
  Of the task I undertook.
Should the lion-skin make for profit,

He'll attempt to make me doff it—
That I know—by hook or crook.
Still I'll make my acting real,
Peppery gait and fiery look.
Ha! Here comes the great ordeal:
See the door. I'm sure it shook!
(*The central door opens and the Porter,* AEACUS, *comes out with two other slaves.*)

AEACUS

Here, seize this dog-stealer and lead him forth
To justice, quick.

DIONYSUS (*imitating* XANTHIAS)

Here's fun for somebody.

XANTHIAS (*in a Heraclean attitude*)

Stop, zounds! Not one step more!

AEACUS

You want to fight?
Ho, Ditylas, Sceblyas, and Pardocas,
Forward! Oblige this person with some fighting!

DIONYSUS (*while the Scythians gradually overpower* XANTHIAS)

How shocking to assault the constables—
And stealing other people's things!

AEACUS

Unnatural,
That's what I call it.

DIONYSUS

Quite a pain to see.

XANTHIAS (*now overpowered and disarmed*)

Now, by Lord Zeus, if ever I've been here
Or stol'n from you the value of one hair,
You may take and hang me on the nearest tree! . . .
Now, listen: and I'll act quite fairly by you;
(*Suddenly indicating* DIONYSUS)
Take this poor boy, and put him to the question! [18]
And if you find me guilty, hang me straight.

AEACUS

What tortures do you allow?

XANTHIAS

Use all you like.
Tie him in the ladder, hang him by the feet,
Whip off his skin with bristle-whips and rack him;
You might well try some vinegar up his nose,
And bricks upon his chest, and so on. Only
No scourges made of . . . leek or young shalott.[19]

AEACUS

A most frank offer, most frank.—If my treatment
Disables him, the value shall be paid.

XANTHIAS

Don't mention it. Remove him and begin.

AEACUS

Thank you, we'll do it here, that you may witness
Exactly what he says. (*To* DIONYSUS) Put down your bundle,
And mind you tell the truth.

DIONYSUS (*who has hitherto been speechless with horror, now bursting out*)

I warn all present,
To torture me is an illegal act,
Being immortal! And whoever does so
Must take the consequences.

AEACUS

Why, who *are* you?

DIONYSUS

The immortal Dionysus, son of Zeus;
And this my slave.

AEACUS (*to* XANTHIAS)

You hear his protest?

XANTHIAS

Yes;
All the more reason, that, for whipping him;
If he's a real immortal he won't feel it.

DIONYSUS

Well, but you claim to be immortal too;
They ought to give you just the same as me.

XANTHIAS

That's fair enough. All right; whichever of us
You first find crying, or the least bit minding
Your whip, you're free to say he's no true god.

AEACUS

Sir, you behave like a true gentleman;
You come to justice of yourself!—Now then,
Strip, both.

XANTHIAS

How will you test us?

AEACUS

Easily:
You'll each take whack and whack about.

XANTHIAS

All right.

AEACUS (*striking* XANTHIAS)

There.

XANTHIAS (*controlling himself with an effort*)

Watch now, if you see me even wince.

AEACUS

But I've already hit you!

XANTHIAS

I think not.

AEACUS

Upon my word, it looks as if I hadn't.
Well, now I'll go and whack the other.

(*Strikes* DIONYSUS)

DIONYSUS (*also controlling himself*)

When?

AEACUS

I've done it.

DIONYSUS (*with an air of indifference*)

Odd, it didn't make me sneeze!

AEACUS

It *is* odd!—Well, I'll try the first again.

(*He crosses to* XANTHIAS.)

XANTHIAS

All right. Be quick. (*The blow falls*) Whe-ew

AEACUS

Ah, why "whe-ew"?

It didn't hurt you?

XANTHIAS (*recovering himself*)

No; I just was thinking

When my Diomean Feast would next be due.

AEACUS

A holy thought!—I'll step across again.

(*Strikes* DIONYSUS, *who howls*)

DIONYSUS

Ow-ow!

AEACUS

What's that?

DIONYSUS (*recovering himself*)

I saw some cavalry.

AEACUS

What makes your eyes run?

DIONYSUS

There's a smell of onions!

AEACUS

You're sure it didn't hurt you?

DIONYSUS

Hurt? Not it.

AEACUS

I'll step across again then to the first one.

(*Strikes* XANTHIAS, *who also howls.*)

XANTHIAS

Hi-i!

AEACUS

What is it now?

XANTHIAS

Take out that thorn.

(*Pointing to his foot.*)

AEACUS

What does it mean?—Over we go again.

(*Strikes* DIONYSUS.)

DIONYSUS

O Lord! (*hurriedly turning his wail into a line of poetry*) "of Delos or of Pytho's rock."

XANTHIAS (*triumphantly*)

It hurts. You heard?

DIONYSUS

It doesn't! I was saying
A verse of old Hipponax to myself.

XANTHIAS

You're making nothing of it. Hit him hard
Across the soft parts underneath the ribs.

AEACUS (*to* XANTHIAS)

A good idea! Turn over on your back!

(*Strikes him.*)

XANTHIAS (*as before*)

O Lord!

DIONYSUS

It hurts!

XANTHIAS (*as though continuing*)

"Posidon ruler free
Of cliffs Aegean and the grey salt sea."

AEACUS

Now, by Demeter, it's beyond my powers
To tell which one of you's a god!—Come in;
We'll ask my master. He and Persephassa
Will easily know you, being gods themselves.

DIONYSUS

Most wisely said. Indeed I could have wished
You'd thought of that before you had me swished.

(*They all go into the house. The* CHORUS, *left alone on the stage, turns towards the audience.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Draw near, O Muse, to the spell of my song,
Set foot in the sanctified place,
And see thy faithful Athenians throng,
To whom the myriad arts belong,
The myriad marks of grace,

Greater than Cleophon's own,
On whose lips, with bilingual moan,
A swallow from Thrace
Has taken his place
And chirps in blood-curdling tone
On the gibberish-tree's thick branches high
As he utters a nightingale note,
A tumultuous cry
That he's certain to die
Even with an equal vote!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It behoves this sacred Chorus, in its wisdom and its bliss,
To assist the state with counsel. Now our first advice is this:
Let Athenians all stand equal; penal laws be swept away.
Some of us have been misguided, following Phrynichus astray;
Now for all of these, we urge you, let full freedom be decreed
To confess the cause that tripped them and blot out that old misdeed.
Next, no man should live in Athens outcast, robbed of every right.
Shame it is that low-born aliens, just for sharing one sea-fight,
Should forthwith become 'Plataeans' and instead of slaves be masters—
(Not that in the least I blame you for thus meeting our disasters;
No; I pay respectful homage to the one wise thing you've done):
But remember these men also, your own kinsmen, sire and son,
Who have ofttimes fought beside you, spilt their blood on many seas:
Grant for that one fault the pardon which they crave you on their knees.
You whom Nature made for wisdom, let your vengeance fall to sleep;
Greet as kinsmen and Athenians, burghers true to win and keep,
Whosoe'er will brave the storms and fight for Athens at your side!
But be sure, if still we spurn them, if we wrap us in our pride,

Stand alone, with Athens tossing in the long arm of the waves,
Men in days to come shall wonder, and not praise you in your graves.

CHORUS (*singing*)

An' I the make of a man may trow,
And the ways that lead to a fall,
Not long will the ape that troubles us now,
Not long little Cligenes—champion, I vow,
Of rascally washermen all,

Who hold over soap their sway
And lye and Cimolian clay
(Which they thriftily mix
With the scrapings of bricks)—
Not long will our little one stay!
Oh, 'tis well he is warlike and ready to kick
For if once home from supper he trotted,
Talking genially thick
And without his big stick,
We should probably find him garotted.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It has often struck our notice that the course our city runs
Is the same towards men and money.—She has true and worthy sons:
She has good and ancient silver, she has good and recent gold.
These are coins untouched with alloys; everywhere their fame is told,
Not all Hellas holds their equal, not all Barbary far and near,
Gold or silver, each well minted, tested each and ringing clear.
Yet, we never use them! Others always pass from hand to hand,
Sorry brass just struck last week and branded with a wretched brand.
So with men we know for upright, blameless lives and noble names,
Trained in music and palaestra, freemen's choirs and freemen's games,
These we spurn for men of brass, for red-haired things of unknown breed,
Rascal cubs of mongrel fathers—them we use at every need!
Creatures just arrived in Athens, whom our city, years ago,
Scarcely would have used as scapegoats [20] to be slaughtered for a show!
Even now, O race demented, there is time to change your ways;
Use once more what's worth the using. If we 'scape, the more the praise
That we fought our fight with wisdom; or, if all is lost for good,
Let the tree on which they hang us be, at least, of decent wood!
(*The door opens, and the two slaves,* AEACUS *and* XANTHIAS, *return.*)

AEACUS

By Zeus, that's what I call a gentleman!
That master of yours!

XANTHIAS

Gentleman? That he is!
There's nothing in his head but wine and wenches!

AEACUS

But not to whip you when you were clean convicted,
A slave caught masquerading as his master!

XANTHIAS (*significantly*)

I'd like to see him try it!

AEACUS

There you go!
The old slave trick, that I'm so fond of too.

XANTHIAS

You like it, eh?

AEACUS

Like it? Why, when I get
Behind my master's back and quietly curse him,
I feel just like the Blessed in the Mysteries!

XANTHIAS

What about muttering as you go outside
After a whacking?

AEACUS

Yes, I like that too.

XANTHIAS (*with increasing excitement*)

And prying into people's secrets, eh?

AEACUS (*the same*)

By Zeus, there's nothing like it in the world!

XANTHIAS

Oh! Zeus makes brethren meet!—And what of list'ning
To what the masters say?

AEACUS

It makes me mad!

XANTHIAS
And telling every word of it to strangers?

AEACUS
Madder than mad, stark staring crimson madder!

XANTHIAS
O Lord Apollo, clap your right hand there,
Give me your cheek to kiss, and you kiss me!
(*They embrace; a loud noise is heard inside the house.*)
But Zeus!—our own Zeus of the Friendly Jailbirds—
What is that noise . . . those shouts and quarrelling . . .
Inside?

AEACUS
That? Aeschylus and Euripides!

XANTHIAS
Eh?

AEACUS
Yes; there's a big business just astir,
And hot dissension among all the dead.

XANTHIAS
About what?

AEACUS
There's a law established here
Concerning all the large and liberal arts,
Which grants the foremost master in each art
Free entertainment at the Central Hearth,
And also a special throne in Pluto's row . . .

XANTHIAS
Oh, now I understand!

AEACUS
To hold until
There comes one greater; then he must make way.

XANTHIAS
But how has this affected Aeschylus?

AEACUS
Aeschylus held the throne of tragedy,
As greatest . . .

XANTHIAS
Held it? Why, who holds it now?

AEACUS
Well, when Euripides came down, he gave
Free exhibitions to our choicest thieves,
Footpads, cut-purses, burglars, father-beaters,
—Of whom we have numbers here; and when they heard
The neat retorts, the fencing, and the twists,
They all went mad and thought him something splendid.
And he, growing proud, laid hands upon the throne
Where Aeschylus sat.

XANTHIAS
And wasn't pelted off?

AEACUS
Not he. The whole folk clamoured for a trial
To see which most was master of his craft.

XANTHIAS
The whole jail-folk?

AEACUS
Exactly,—loud as trumpets.

XANTHIAS
And were there none to fight for Aeschylus?

AEACUS
Goodness is scarce, you know. (*Indicating the audience*) The same as here!

XANTHIAS
And what does Pluto mean to do about it?

AEACUS
Why, hold a trial and contest on the spot
To test their skill for certain.

XANTHIAS (*reflecting*)
But, I say,
Sophocles surely must have claimed the throne?

AEACUS

Not he; as soon as ever he came down,
He kissed old Aeschylus, and wrung his hand,
And Aeschylus made room on half his seat.
And now he means to wait—or so, at least,
Clidemides informs us—in reserve.
If Aeschylus wins the day, he'll rest content:
If not, why then, he says, for poor Art's sake,
He must show fight against Euripides!

XANTHIAS

It is to be, then?

AEACUS

Certainly, quite soon.
Just where you stand we'll have the shock of war.
They'll weigh the poetry line by line . . .

XANTHIAS

Poor thing,
A lamb set in the meat-scale and found wanting!

AEACUS

They'll bring straight-edges out, and cubit-rules,
And folded cube-frames . .

XANTHIAS

Is it bricks they want?

AEACUS

And mitre-squares and wedges! Line by line
Euripides will test all tragedies!

XANTHIAS

That must make Aeschylus angry, I should think?

AEACUS

Well, he did stoop and glower like a mad bull.

XANTHIAS

Who'll be the judge?

AEACUS

That was a difficulty.
Both found an utter dearth of proper critics;
For Aeschylus objected to the Athenians. . . .

XANTHIAS

Perhaps he thought the jail-folk rather many?

AEACUS

And all the world beside, he thought mere dirt
At seeing what kind of thing a poet was.
So, in the end, they fixed upon your master
As having much experience in the business.
But come in; when the master's face looks grave
There's mostly trouble coming for the slave.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Eftsoons shall dire anger interne be the Thunderer's portion
When his foe's glib tusk fresh whetted for blood he descries;
Then fell shall his heart be, and mad; and a pallid distortion
Descend as a cloud on his eyes.

Yea, words with plumes wild on the wind and with helmets a-glancing,
With axles a-splinter and marble a-shiver, eftsoons
Shall bleed, as a man meets the shock of a Thought-builder's prancing
Stanzas of dusky dragoons.

The deep crest of his mane shall uprise as he slowly unlimbers
The long-drawn wrath of his brow, and lets loose with a roar
Epithets welded and screwed, like new torrent-swept timbers
Blown loose by a giant at war.

Then rises the man of the Mouth; then battleward flashes
A tester of verses, a smooth and serpentine tongue,
To dissect each phrase into mincemeat, and argue to ashes
That high-towered labour of lung!

(*The door opens again. Enter* EURIPIDES, DIONYSUS, *and* AESCHYLUS.)

EURIPIDES

Pray, no advice to me! I won't give way,
I claim that I'm more master of my art.

DIONYSUS

You hear him, Aeschylus. Why don't you speak?

EURIPIDES

He wants to open with an awful silence—
The blood-curdling reserve of his first scenes.

DIONYSUS

My dear sir, I must beg! Control your language!

EURIPIDES

I know him; I've seen through him years ago;
Bard of the "noble savage," wooden-mouthed,
No door, no bolt, no bridle to his tongue,
A torrent of pure bombast—tied in bundles!

AESCHYLUS (*breaking out*)

How say'st thou, Son o' the Goddess of the Greens? [21]—
You dare speak thus of me, you phrase-collector,
Blind-beggar-bard and scum of rifled rag-bags!
Oh, you shall rue it!

DIONYSUS

Stop! Stop, Aeschylus;
Strike not thine heart to fire on rancour old.

AESCHYLUS

No; I'll expose this crutch-and-cripple playwright,
And what he's worth for all his insolence.

DIONYSUS (*to attendants*)

A lamb, a black lamb, quick, boys! Bring it out
To sacrifice; a hurricane's let loose! [22]

AESCHYLUS (*to* EURIPIDES)

You and your Cretan dancing-solos! You
And the ugly amours that you set to verse!

DIONYSUS (*interposing*)

One moment, please, most noble Aeschylus!
And you, poor wretch, if you have any prudence,
Get out of the hailstones quick, or else, by Zeus,
Some word as big as your head will catch you crash
Behind the ear, and knock out all the . . . Telephus!
Nay, Aeschylus, pray, pray control your anger;
Examine and submit to be examined
With a cool head. Two poets should not meet
In fishwife style; but here are you, straight off,
Ablaze and roaring like an oak on fire.

EURIPIDES

For my part I'm quite ready, with no shrinking,
To bite first or be bitten, as he pleases.

Here are my dialogue, music, and construction;
Here's Peleus at your service, Meleager,
And Aeolus, and . . . yes, Telephus, by all means!

DIONYSUS

Do you consent to the trial, Aeschylus? Speak.

AESCHYLUS

I well might take objection to the place;
It's no fair field for him and me.

DIONYSUS

Why not?

AESCHYLUS

Because my writings haven't died with me,
As his have; so he'll have them all to hand. . . .
However, I waive the point, if you think fit.

DIONYSUS

Go, some one, bring me frankincense and fire
That I may pray for guidance, to decide
This contest in the Muses' strictest ways;
To whom, meantime, uplift your hymn of praise!

CHORUS (*singing*)

All hail, ye nine heaven-born virginal Muses,
Whiche'er of ye watch o'er the manners and uses
Of the founts of quotation, when, meeting in fray—
All hearts drawn tense for who wins and who loses—
With wrestling lithe each the other confuses,
Look on the pair that do battle to-day!
These be the men to take poems apart
By chopping, riving, sawing;
Here is the ultimate trial of Art
To due completion drawing!

DIONYSUS

Won't you two pray before you show your lines?

AESCHYLUS (*going up to the altar*)

Demeter, thou who feedest all my thought,
Grant me but worthiness to worship thee!

DIONYSUS (*to* EURIPIDES)

Won't you put on some frankincense?

EURIPIDES (*staying where he is*)
Oh, thank you;
The gods I pray to are of other metal!

DIONYSUS
Your own stamp, eh? New struck?

EURIPIDES
Exactly so.

DIONYSUS
Well, pray away then to your own peculiar.

EURIPIDES (*esoterically*)
Ether, whereon I batten! Vocal cords!
Reason, and nostrils swift to scent and sneer,
Grant that I duly probe each word I hear.

CHORUS (*singing*)
All of us to hear are yearning
Further from these twins of learning,
What dread road they walk, what burning
Heights they climb of speech and song.
Tongues alert for battle savage,
Tempers keen for war and ravage,
Angered hearts to both belong.
He will fight with passes witty
Smooth and smacking of the city,
Gleaming blades unflecked with rust;
He will seize—to end the matter—
Tree-trunks torn and clubbed, to batter
Brains to bits, and plunge and scatter
Whole arena-fulls of dust!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
Now, quick to work. Be sure you both do justice to your cases,
Clear sense, no loose analogies, and no long commonplaces.

EURIPIDES
A little later I will treat my own artistic mettle,
This person's claims I should prefer immediately to settle.
I'll show you how he posed and prosed; with what audacious fooling
He tricked an audience fresh and green from Phrynichus's schooling
Those sole veiled figures on the stage were first among his graces,
Achilles, say, or Niobé, who never showed their faces,
But stood like so much scene-painting, and never a grunt they uttered!

DIONYSUS

Why, no, by Zeus, no more they did!

EURIPIDES

And on the Chorus spluttered
Through long song-systems, four on end, the actors mute as fishes!

DIONYSUS

I somehow loved that silence, though; and felt it met my wishes
As no one's talk does nowadays!

EURIPIDES

You hadn't yet seen through it!
That's all.

DIONYSUS

I really think you're right! But still, what made him do it?

EURIPIDES

The instinct of a charlatan, to keep the audience guessing
If Niobé ever meant to speak—the play meantime progressing!

DIONYSUS

Of course it was! The sly old dog, to think of how he tricked us!—
Don't (*to* AESCHYLUS) ramp and fume!

EURIPIDES

We're apt to do so when the facts convict us!
—Then after this tomfoolery, the heroine, feeling calmer,
Would utter some twelve wild-bull words, on mid-way in the drama,
Long ones, with crests and beetling brows, and gorgons round the border,
That no man ever heard on earth.

AESCHYLUS

The red plague . . . !

DIONYSUS

Order, order!

EURIPIDES

Intelligible—not one line!

DIONYSUS (*to* AESCHYLUS)

Please! Won't your teeth stop gnashing?

EURIPIDES

All fosses and Scamander-beds, and bloody targes flashing,
With gryphon-eagles bronze-embossed, and crags, and riders reeling,
Which somehow never quite joined on.

DIONYSUS

By Zeus, sir, quite my feeling!
A question comes in Night's long hours, that haunts me like a spectre,
What kind of fish or fowl you'd call a "russet hippalector."

AESCHYLUS (*breaking in*)

It was a ship's sign, idiot, such as every joiner fixes!

DIONYSUS

Indeed! I thought perhaps it meant that music-man Eryxis!

[EURIPIDES

You like then, in a tragic play, a cock? You think it mixes?]

AESCHYLUS (*to* EURIPIDES)

And what did you yourself produce, O fool with pride deluded?

EURIPIDES

Not "hippalectors," thank the Lord, nor "tragelaphs," as you did—
The sort of ornament they use to fill a Persian curtain!
—I had the Drama straight from you, all bloated and uncertain,
Weighed down with rich and heavy words, puffed out past comprehension.
I took the case in hand; applied treatment for such distension—
Beetroot, light phrases, little walks, hot book-juice, and cold reasoning;
Then fed her up on solos. . . .

DIONYSUS (*aside*)

With Cephisophon for seasoning!

EURIPIDES

I didn't rave at random, or plunge in and make confusions.
My first appearing character explained, with due allusions,
The whole play's pedigree.

DIONYSUS (*aside*)

Your own you left in wise obscurity!

EURIPIDES

Then no one from the start with me could idle with security.
They had to work. The men, the slaves, the women, all made speeches,
The kings, the little girls, the hags . . .

AESCHYLUS

Just see the things he teaches!
And shouldn't you be hanged for that?

EURIPIDES

No, by the lord Apollo!
It's democratic!

DIONYSUS (*to* EURIPIDES)

That's no road for you, my friend, to follow;
You'll find the "little walk" too steep; I recommend you quit it.[23]

EURIPIDES

Next, I taught all the town to talk with freedom.

AESCHYLUS

I admit it.
'Twere better, ere you taught them, you had died amid their curses!

EURIPIDES

I gave them canons to apply and squares for marking verses;
Taught them to see, think, understand, to scheme for what they wanted,
To fall in love, think evil, question all things. . . .

AESCHYLUS

Granted, granted!

EURIPIDES

I put things on the stage that came from daily life and business.
Where men could catch me if I tripped; could listen without dizziness
To things they knew, and judge my art. I never crashed and lightened
And bullied people's senses out; nor tried to keep them frightened
With Magic Swans and Aethiop knights, loud barb and clanging vizor!
Then look at my disciples, too, and mark what creatures his are!
Phormisius is his product and the looby lump Megaenetus,
All trumpet, lance, moustache, and glare, who twist their clubs of pine at us;
While Clitophon is mine, sirs, and Theramenes the Matchless!

DIONYSUS

Theramenes! Ah, that's the man! All danger leaves him scratchless.
His friends may come to grief, and he be found in awkward fixes,
But always tumbles right end up, not aces—no: all sixes!

EURIPIDES (*more rapidly*)
This was the kind of lore I brought
To school my town in ways of thought,
I mingled reasoning with my art
And shrewdness, till I fired their heart
To brood, to think things through and through;
And rule their houses better, too.

DIONYSUS (*still more rapidly*)
Yes, by the powers, that's very true!
No burgher now, who comes indoors,
But straight looks round the house and roars:
"Where is the saucepan gone? And who
Has bitten that sprat's head away?
And, out, alas! The earthen pot
I bought last year is not, is not!
Where are the leeks of yesterday?
And who has gnawed this olive, pray?"
Whereas, before they took his school,
Each sat at home, a simple, cool,
Religious, unsuspecting fool,
And happy in his sheep-like way!

CHORUS (*singing*)
Great Achilles, gaze around thee!
'Twill astound thee and confound thee.
Answer now: but keep in bound the
Words that off the course would tear,
Bit in teeth, in turmoil flocking.
Yes: it's monstrous—shameful—shocking—
Brave old warrior. But beware!

Don't retort with haste or passion;
Meet the squalls in sailor fashion,
Mainsail reefed and mast nigh bare;
Then, when safe beyond disaster
You may press him fiercer, faster,
Close and show yourself his master,
Once the wind is smooth and fair!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
O thou who first of the Greeks did build great words to heaven-high towers,
And the essence of tragedy-padding distilled, give vent to thy pent-up showers.

AESCHYLUS

I freely admit that I take it amiss, and I think my anger is just,
At having to answer a man like this. Still, lest I should seem nonplussed,
Pray, tell me on what particular ground a poet should claim admiration?

EURIPIDES

If his art is true, and his counsel sound; and if he brings help to the nation,
By making men better in some respect.

AESCHYLUS

And suppose you have done the reverse,
And have had upon good strong men the effect of making them weaker and worse,
What, do you say, should your recompense be?

DIONYSUS

The gallows! You needn't ask him.

AESCHYLUS

Well, think what they were when he had them from me! Good six-footers, solid of limb,
Well-born, well-bred, not ready to fly from obeying their country's call,
Nor in latter-day fashion to loiter and lie, and keep their consciences small;
Their life was in shafts of ash and of elm, in bright plumes fluttering wide,
In lance and greaves and corslet and helm, and hearts of sevenfold hide!

EURIPIDES (*aside*)

Oh, now he's begun and will probably run a whole armourer's shop on my head!
(*To* AESCHYLUS) Stop! How was it due in especial to you, if they were so very—well-bred?

DIONYSUS

Come, answer him, Aeschylus! Don't be so hot, or smoulder in silent disdain.

AESCHYLUS (*crushingly*)

By a tragedy 'brimming with Ares!'

DIONYSUS

A what?

AESCHYLUS

The "Seven against Thebes."

DIONYSUS

Pray explain.

AESCHYLUS

There wasn't a man could see that play but he hungered for havoc and gore.

DIONYSUS

I'm afraid that tells in the opposite way. For the Thebans profited more,
It urged them to fight without flinching or fear, and they did so; and long may you rue it!

AESCHYLUS

The same thing was open to all of you here, but it didn't amuse you to do it!
Then next I taught you for glory to long, and against all odds stand fast;
That was "The Persians," which bodied in song the noblest deed of the past.

DIONYSUS

Yes, yes! When Darius arose from the grave it gave me genuine joy,
And the Chorus stood with its arms a-wave, and observed, "Yow—oy, Yow—oy!" [24]

AESCHYLUS

Yes, that's the effect for a play to produce! For observe, from the world's first start
Those poets have all been of practical use who have been supreme in their art.
First, Orpheus withheld us from bloodshed impure, and vouchsafed us the great revelation;
Musaeus was next, with wisdom to cure diseases and teach divination.
Then Hesiod showed us the season to plough, to sow, and to reap. And the laurels
That shine upon Homer's celestial brow are equally due to his morals!
He taught men to stand, to march, and to arm. . . .

DIONYSUS

So that was old Homer's profession?
Then I wish he could keep his successors from harm, like Pantacles in the procession,
Who first got his helmet well strapped on his head, and then tried to put in the plume!

AESCHYLUS

There be many brave men that he fashioned and bred, like Lamachus, now in his tomb.
And in his great spirit my plays had a part, with their heroes many and brave—
Teucers, Patrocluses, lions at heart; who made my citizens crave
To dash like them at the face of the foe, and leap at the call of a trumpet!—
But no Stheneboea I've given you, no; no Phaedra, no heroine-strumpet!
If I've once put a woman in love in one act of one play, may my teaching be scouted!

EURIPIDES

No, you hadn't exactly the style to attract Aphrodité!

AESCHYLUS

I'm better without it.
A deal too much of that style she found in some of your friends and you,
And once, at least, left you flat on the ground!

DIONYSUS

By Zeus, that's perfectly true.
If he dealt his neighbours such rattling blows, we must think how he suffered in person.

EURIPIDES

And what are the public defects you suppose my poor Stheneboea to worsen?

AESCHYLUS (*evading the question with a jest*)

She makes good women, and good men's wives, when their hearts are weary and want ease,
Drink jorums of hemlock and finish their lives, to gratify Bellerophontes!

EURIPIDES

But did I invent the story I told of—Phaedra, say? Wasn't it history?

AESCHYLUS

It was true, right enough; but the poet should hold such a truth enveloped in mystery,
And not represent it or make it a play. It's his duty to teach, and you know it.
As a child learns from all who may come in his way, so the grown world learns from the poet.
Oh, words of good counsel should flow from his voice—

EURIPIDES

And words like Mount Lycabettus
Or Parnes, such as you give us for choice, must needs be good counsel?—
Oh, let us,
Oh, let us at least use the language of men!

AESCHYLUS

Flat cavil, sir! cavil absurd!
When the subject is great and the sentiment, then, of necessity, great grows the word;
When heroes give range to their hearts, is it strange if the speech of them over us towers?
Nay, the garb of them too must be gorgeous to view, and majestical, nothing like ours.
All this I saw, and established as law, till you came and spoilt it.

EURIPIDES

How so?

AESCHYLUS

You wrapped them in rags from old beggarmen's bags, to express their heroical woe,
And reduce the spectator to tears of compassion!

EURIPIDES

Well, what was the harm if I did?

AESCHYLUS (*evading the question as before*)

Bah, your modern rich man has adopted the fashion, for remission of taxes to bid;
"He couldn't provide a trireme if he tried;" he implores us his state to behold.

DIONYSUS

Though rags outside may very well hide good woollens beneath, if it's cold!
And when once he's exempted, he gaily departs and pops up at the fishmongers' stalls.

AESCHYLUS (*continuing*)

Then, next, you have trained in the speechmaking arts nigh every infant that crawls.
Oh, this is the thing that such havoc has wrought in the wrestling-school, narrowed the hips
Of the poor pale chattering children, and taught the crews of the pick of the ships

To answer back pat to their officer's nose! How unlike my old sailor of yore,
With no thought in his head but to guzzle his brose and sing as he bent at the oar!

DIONYSUS

And spit on the heads of the rowers below,[25] and garott stray lubbers on shore!
But our new man just sails where it happens to blow, and argues, and rows no more!

AESCHYLUS (*more rapidly*)

What hasn't he done that is under the sun,
And the love-dealing dames that with him have begun?
One's her own brother's wife;
One says Life is not Life;
And one goes into shrines to give birth to a son!
Our city through him is filled to the brim
With monkeys who chatter to every one's whim;
Little scriveners' clerks
With their winks and their larks,
But for wrestle or race not a muscle in trim!

DIONYSUS (*still more rapidly*)

Not a doubt of it! Why, I laughted fit to cry
At the Panathenaea, a man to espy,
Pale, flabby, and fat,
And bent double at that,
Puffing feebly behind, with a tear in his eye:

Till there in their place, with cord and with brace,
Were the Potters assembled to quicken his pace;
And down they came, whack!
On sides, belly, and back,
Till he blew out his torch and just fled from the race![26]

CHORUS (*singing*)

Never were such warriors, never
Prize so rich and feud so keen:
Dangerous, too, such knots to sever:
He drives on with stern endeavour,
He falls back, but rallies ever,
Marks his spot and stabs it clean!

Change your step, though! Do not tarry;
Other ways there be to harry
  Old antagonists in art.
Show whatever sparks you carry,
Question, answer, thrust and parry—
Be they new or ancient, marry,
  Let them fly, well-winged and smart!

If you fear, from former cases,
  That the audience p'raps may fail
To appreciate your paces,
Your allusions and your graces,
Look a moment in their faces!
  They will tell another tale.

Oft from long campaigns returning
Thro' the devious roads of learning
  These have wandered, books in hand:
Nature gave them keen discerning
Eyes; and you have set them burning!
Sharpest thought or deepest yearning—
  Speak, and these will understand.

EURIPIDES

Quite so; I'll turn then to his prologues straight,
And make in that first part of tragedy
My first review in detail of this Genius!
His exposition always was obscure.

DIONYSUS

Which one will you examine!

EURIPIDES

Which? Oh, lots!
First quote me that from the Oresteia, please.

DIONYSUS

Ho, silence in the court! Speak, Aeschylus.

AESCHYLUS (*quoting the first lines of The Choephori*)

"Guide of the Dead, warding a father's way,
Be thou my light and saviour, where I pray,
In this my fatherland, returned, restored."

DIONYSUS (*to* EURIPIDES)
You find some false lines there?

EURIPIDES
About a dozen!

DIONYSUS
Why, altogether there are only three!

EURIPIDES
But every one has twenty faults in drawing!
(AESCHYLUS *begins to interrupt*)

DIONYSUS
No, stop, stop, Aeschylus; or perhaps you'll find
Your debts run up to more than three iambics.

AESCHYLUS (*raging*)
Stop to let *him* speak?

DIONYSUS
Well, that's my advice.

EURIPIDES
He's gone straight off some thousand miles astray.

AESCHYLUS
Of course it's foolery—but what do *I* care?
Point out the faults.

EURIPIDES
Repeat the lines again.

AESCHYLUS
"Guide of the Dead, warding a father's way, . . ."

EURIPIDES
Orestes speaks those words, I take it, standing
On his dead father's tomb?

AESCHYLUS
I don't deny it.

EURIPIDES
Then what's the father's way that Hermes wards?
Is it the way Orestes' father went,
To darkness by a woman's dark intent?

AESCHYLUS

No, no! He calls on Eriunian Hermes,
Guide of the Dead, and adds a word to say
That office is derived from Hermes' father.

EURIPIDES

That's worse than I supposed! For if your Hermes
Derives his care of dead men from his father, . . .

DIONYSUS (*interrupting*)

Why, resurrectioning's the family trade!

AESCHYLUS

Dionysus, dull of fragrance is thy wine!

DIONYSUS

Well, say the next; and (*to* EURIPIDES) you look out for slips.

AESCHYLUS

"Be thou my light and saviour where I pray
In this my fatherland returned, restored."

EURIPIDES

Our noble Aeschylus repeats himself.

DIONYSUS

How so?

EURIPIDES

Observe his phrasing, and you'll see.
First to this land "returned" and then "restored";
'Returned' is just the same thing as 'restored.'

DIONYSUS

Why, yes! It's just as if you asked your neighbour,
'Lend me a pail, or, if not that, a bucket.'

AESCHYLUS

Oh, too much talking has bemuzzed your brain!
The words are not the same; the line is perfect.

DIONYSUS

Now, is it really? Tell me how you mean.

AESCHYLUS

Returning home is the act of any person
Who has a home; he comes back, nothing more;
An exile both returns and is restored!

DIONYSUS

True, by Apollo! (*To* EURIPIDES) What do you say to that?

EURIPIDES

I don't admit Orestes was restored.
He came in secret with no legal permit.

DIONYSUS

By Hermes, yes! (*aside*) I wonder what they mean!

EURIPIDES

Go on then to the next.

(AESCHYLUS *is silent.*)

DIONYSUS

Come, Aeschylus,
Do as he says; (*to* EURIPIDES) and you look out for faults.

AESCHYLUS

"Yea, on this bank of death, I call my lord
To hear and list. . . ."

EURIPIDES

Another repetition!
"To hear and list"—the same thing palpably!

DIONYSUS

The man was talking to the dead, you dog,
Who are always called three times—and then don't hear.

AESCHYLUS

Come, how did *you* write prologues?

EURIPIDES

Oh, I'll show you.
And if you find there any repetitions
Or any irrelevant padding,—spit upon me!

DIONYSUS

Oh, do begin. I mustn't miss those prologues
In all their exquisite exactitude!

EURIPIDES

"At first was Oedipus in happy state."

AESCHYLUS

He wasn't! He was born and bred in misery.
Did not Apollo doom him still unborn
To slay his father? . . .

DIONYSUS (*aside*)

His poor unborn father?

AESCHYLUS

"A happy state at first," you call it, do you?

EURIPIDES (*contemptuously resuming*)

"At first was Oedipus in happy state,
Then changed he, and became most desolate."

AESCHYLUS

He didn't. He was never anything else!
Why, he was scarcely born when they exposed him
In winter, in a pot, that he might never
Grow up and be his father's murderer.
Then off he crawled to Polybus with sore feet,
Then married an old woman, twice his age,
Who further chanced to be his mother, then
Tore out his eyes: the lucky dog he was!

DIONYSUS

At least he fought no sea-fight with a colleague
Called Erasinides!

EURIPIDES

That's no criticism.
I write my prologues singularly well!

AESCHYLUS

By Zeus, I won't go pecking word by word
At every phrase; I'll take one little oil-can,[27]
God helping me, and send your prologues pop!

EURIPIDES

My prologues pop . . . with oil-cans?

AESCHYLUS

Just one oil-can!
You write them so that nothing comes amiss,
The bed-quilt, or the oil-can, or the clothes-bag,
All suit your tragic verse! Wait and I'll prove it.

EURIPIDES

You'll prove it? Really?

AESCHYLUS

Yes.

DIONYSUS

Begin to quote.

EURIPIDES

"Aegyptus, so the tale is spread afar,
With fifty youths fled in a sea-borne car,
But, reaching Argos . . ."

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

What's that about the oil-can! Drat the thing!
Quote him another prologue, and let's see.

EURIPIDES

"Dionysus, who with wand and fawn-skin dight
On great Parnassus races in the light
Of lamps far-flashing, . . ."

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

Alas! again the oil-can finds our heart!

EURIPIDES (*beginning to reflect anxiously*)

Oh, it won't come to much, though! Here's another,
With not a crack to stick the oil-can in!
"No man hath bliss in full and flawless health;
Lo, this one hath high race, but little wealth;
That, base in blood, hath . . ."

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

Euripides!

EURIPIDES

Well?

DIONYSUS

Better furl your sails;
This oil-can seems inclined to raise the wind!

EURIPIDES

Bah, I disdain to give a thought to it!
I'll dash it from his hands in half a minute.
(*He racks his memory*)

DIONYSUS

Well, quote another,—and beware of oil-cans.

EURIPIDES

"Great Cadmus long ago, Agenor's son,
From Sidon racing, . . ."

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

Oh, this is awful! Buy the thing outright,
Before it messes every blessed prologue!

EURIPIDES

I buy him off?

DIONYSUS

I strongly recommend it.

EURIPIDES

No; I have many prologues yet to cite
Where he can't find a chink to pour his oil.
"As rapid wheels to Pisa bore him on,
Tantalian Pelops . . ."

AESCHYLUS

Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS

What did I tell you? There it sticks again!
You might let Pelops have a new one, though—
You get quite good ones very cheap just now.

EURIPIDES

By Zeus, not yet! I still have plenty left
"From earth King Oeneus, . . ."

AESCHYLUS
Found his oil can gone!

EURIPIDES
You *must* first let me quote one line entire!
"From earth King Oeneus goodly harvest won,
But, while he worshipped, . . ."

AESCHYLUS
Found his oil-can gone!

DIONYSUS
During the prayers! Who can have been the thief!

EURIPIDES (*desperately*)
Oh, let him be! I defy him answer this—
"Great Zeus in heaven, the word of truth has flown, . . ."

DIONYSUS
O mercy! *His* is certain to be gone!
They bristle with long oil-cans, hedgehog-wise,
Your prologues; they're as bunged up as your eyes!
For God's sake change the subject.—Take his songs!

EURIPIDES
Songs? Yes, I have materials to show
How bad his are, and always all alike.

CHORUS (*singing*)
What in the world shall we look for next?
Aeschylus' music! I feel perplexed
How he can want it mended.
I have always held that never a man
Had written or sung since the world began
Melodies half so splendid!
(Can he really find a mistake
In the master of inspiration?
I feel some consternation
For our Bacchic prince's sake!)

EURIPIDES
Wonderful songs they are! You'll see directly;
I'll run them all together into one.

DIONYSUS
I'll take some pebbles, then, and count for you.

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

"O Phthian Achilles, canst hark to the battle's man-slaying shock,
Yea, shock, and not to succour come?
Lo, we of the mere give worship to Hermes, the fount of our stock,
Yea, shock, and not to succour come!"

DIONYSUS

Two shocks to you, Aeschylus, there!

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

"Thou choice of Achaea, wide-ruling Atrides, give heed to my schooling!
Yea, shock, and not to succour come."

DIONYSUS

A third shock that, I declare!

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

"Ah, peace, and give ear! For the Bee-Maids be near to ope wide Artemis' portals.
Yea, shock-a-nock a-succour come!
Behold it is mine to sing of the sign of the way fate-laden to mortals;
Yah, shocker-knocker succucum!" [28]

DIONYSUS

O Zeus Almighty, what a chain of shocks!
I think I'll go away and take a bath;
The shocks are too much for my nerves and kidneys!

EURIPIDES

Not till you've heard another little set
Compounded from his various cithara-songs.

DIONYSUS

Well then, proceed; but don't put any shocks in!

EURIPIDES (*singing*)

"How the might twin-throned of Achaea for Hellene chivalry bringeth
Flattothrat toflattothrat!
The prince of the powers of storm, the Sphinx thereover he wingeth
Flattothrat toflattothrat!
With deedful hand and lance the furious fowl of the air
Flattothrat toflattothrat!
That the wild wind-walking hounds unhindered tear
Flattothrat toflattothrat!

And War toward Ajax leaned his weight,
Flattothrat toflattothrait!"

DIONYSUS

What's Flattothrat? Was it from Marathon
You gathered this wool-gatherer's stuff, or where?

AESCHYLUS

Clean was the place I found them, clean the place
I brought them, loath to glean with Phrynichus
The same enchanted meadow of the Muse.
But any place will do for *him* to poach,
Drink-ditties of Meletus, Carian pipings,
And wakes, and dancing songs—Here, let me show you!
Ho, some one bring my lyre! But no; what need
Of lyres for this stuff? Where's the wench that plays
The bones?—Approach, Euripidean Muse,
These songs are meet for your accompaniment!

DIONYSUS

This Muse was once . . . no Lesbian; not at all!

AESCHYLUS (*to* EURIPIDES)

"Ye halcyons by the dancing sea
Who babble everlastingly,
While on your bathing pinions fall
The dewy foam-sprays, fresh and free;
And, oh, ye spiders deft to crawl
In many a chink of roof and wall,
While left and right, before, behind,
Your fingers wi-i-i-i-ind [29]
The treasures of the labouring loom,
Fruit of the shuttle's minstrel mind,
Where many a songful dolphin trips
To lead the dark-blue-beakèd ships,
And tosses with aerial touch
Temples and race-courses and such.
O bright grape tendril's essence pure,
Wine to sweep care from human lips;
Grant me, O child, one arm-pressúre!"
(*Breaking off.*)
That foot, you see?

DIONYSUS

I do.

AESCHYLUS

And he?

EURIPIDES

Of course I see the foot!

AESCHYLUS

And this is the stuff to trial you bring
And face my songs with the kind of thing
That a man might sing when he dances a fling
To mad Cyrené's flute!

There, that's your choral stuff! But I've not finished,
I want to show the spirit of his solos!

(*Sings again; mysteriously.*)

"What vision of dreaming,
Thou fire-hearted Night,
Death's minion dark-gleaming,
Hast thou sent in thy might?
And his soul was no soul, and the Murk was his mother, a horror to sight!

Black dead was his robe, and his eyes
All blood, and the claws of him great;
Ye maidens, strike fire and arise;
Take pails to the well by the gate,
Yea, bring me a cruse of hot water, to wash off this vision of fate.

Thou Sprite of the Sea,
It is e'en as I feared!
Fellow-lodgers of me,
What dread thing hath appeared?
Lo, Glycé hath stolen my cock, and away from the neighbourhood cleared!

(*Wildly*)

(Ye Nymphs of the Mountain give aid!
And what's come to the scullery-maid?)

(*Tearfully.*)

And I—ah, would I were dead!—
To my work had given my mind;
A spindle heavy with thread
My hands did wi-i-i-ind,
And I meant to go early to market, a suitable buyer to find!

(*Almost weeping.*)

—But he rose, rose, in the air
On quivering blades of flight;
He left me care, care;
And tears, tears of despair,
Fell, fell, and dimmed my sight!

(*Recovering himself; in florid, tragic style.*)

Children of Ida's snows,
Cretans, take up your bows,
And ring the house with many a leaping limb!
And thou, fair maid of bliss,
Dictynna, Artemis,
Range with thy bandogs through each corner dim;
Yea, Thou of twofold Fires,
Grant me my deep desires,
Thou Zeus-born Hecaté; in all men's eyes
Let the detective sheen
Flashed from thy torches keen,
Light me to Glycé's house, and that lost fowl surprise!"

DIONYSUS

Come, stop the singing!

AESCHYLUS

I've had quite enough!
What I want is to bring him to the balance;
The one sure test of what art is worth!

DIONYSUS

So that's my business next? Come forward, please;
I'll weigh out poetry like so much cheese!

(*A large pair of scales is brought forward.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, the workings of genius are keen and laborious!
Here's a new wonder, incredible, glorious!
Who but this twain have the boldness of brain
To so quaint an invention to run?
Such a marvellous thing, if another had said it had
Happened to him, I should never have credited,
I should have just thought that he must
Simply be talking for fun!

DIONYSUS

Come, take your places by the balance.

AESCHYLUS *and* EURIPIDES

There!

DIONYSUS

Now, each take hold of it, and speak your verse,
And don't let go until I say "Cuckoo."

AESCHYLUS *and* EURIPIDES

(*taking their stand at either side of the balance*)

We have it.

DIONYSUS

Now, each a verse into the scale!

EURIPIDES

"Would God no Argo e'er had winged the brine."

AESCHYLUS

"Sperchius, and ye haunts of grazing kine!"

DIONYSUS

Cuckoo! Let go.—Ah, down comes Aeschylus
Far lower.

EURIPIDES

Why, what can be the explanation?

DIONYSUS

That river he put in, to wet his wares
The way wool-dealers do, and make them heavier!
Besides, you know, the verse you gave had wings!

AESCHYLUS

Well, let him speak another and we'll see.

DIONYSUS

Take hold again then.

AESCHYLUS *and* EURIPIDES

There you are.

DIONYSUS

Now speak.

EURIPIDES
"Persuasion, save in speech, no temple hath."

AESCHYLUS
"Lo, one god craves no offering, even Death."

DIONYSUS
Let go, let go!

EURIPIDES
Why, his goes down again!

DIONYSUS
He put in Death, a monstrous heavy thing!

EURIPIDES
But my Persuasion made a lovely line!

DIONYSUS
Persuasion has no bulk and not much weight.
Do look about you for some ponderous line
To force the scale down, something large and strong.

EURIPIDES
Where have I such a thing, now? Where?

DIONYSUS (*mischievously*)
I'll tell you:
"Achilles has two aces and a four!"—
Come, speak your lines; this is the final bout.

EURIPIDES
"A mace of weighted iron his right hand sped."

AESCHYLUS
"Chariot on chariot lay, dead piled on dead."

DIONYSUS
He beats you this time too!

EURIPIDES
How does he do it?

DIONYSUS
Two chariots and two corpses in the scale—
Why, ten Egyptians couldn't lift so much!

AESCHYLUS

Come, no more line-for-lines! Let him jump in
And sit in the scale himself, with all his books,
His wife, his children, his Cephisophon!
I'll back two lines of mine against the lot!

(*The central door opens and* PLUTO *comes forth.*)

PLUTO (*to* DIONYSUS)

Well, is the strife decided?

DIONYSUS

I won't decide! The men are both my friends;
Why should I make an enemy of either?
The one's so good, and I so love the other!

PLUTO

In that case you must give up all you came for!

DIONYSUS

And if I do decide?

PLUTO

Why, not to make
Your trouble fruitless, you may take away
Whichever you decide for.

DIONYSUS

Hearty thanks!
Now, both, approach, and I'll explain —I came
Down here to fetch a poet: "Why a poet?"
That his advice may guide the city true
And so keep up my worship! Consequently,
I'll take whichever seems the best adviser.
Advise me first of Alcibiades,
Whose birth gives travail still to mother Athens.

PLUTO

What is her disposition towards him?

DIONYSUS

Well,
She loves and hates, and longs still to possess.
I want the views of both upon that question!

EURIPIDES

Out on the burgher, who to serve his state
Is slow, but swift to do her deadly hate,
With much wit for himself, and none for her.

DIONYSUS

Good, by Posidon, that!—And what say you?
(*To* AESCHYLUS.)

AESCHYLUS

No lion's whelp within thy precincts raise;
But, if it *be* there, bend thee to its ways!

DIONYSUS

By Zeus the Saviour, still I can't decide!
The one so fine, and the other so convincing!
Well, I must ask you both for one more judgment;
What steps do you advise to save our country?

EURIPIDES

I know and am prepared to say!

DIONYSUS

Say on.

EURIPIDES

Where Mistrust now has sway, put Trust to dwell,
And where Trust is, Mistrust; and all is well.

DIONYSUS

I don't quite follow. Please say that again,
Not quite so cleverly and rather plainer.

EURIPIDES

If we count all the men whom now we trust,
Suspect; and call on those whom now we spurn
To serve us, we may find deliverance yet

DIONYSUS

And what say you?

AESCHYLUS

First tell me about the city;
What servants does she choose? The good?

DIONYSUS

Great Heavens,

She loathes them!

AESCHYLUS

And takes pleasure in the vile?

DIONYSUS

Not she, but has perforce to let them serve her!

AESCHYLUS

What hope of comfort is there for a city
That quarrels with her silk and hates her hodden?

DIONYSUS

That's just what *you* must answer, if you want
To rise again!

AESCHYLUS

I'll answer there, not here.

DIONYSUS

No; better send up blessing from below.

AESCHYLUS

Her safety is to count her enemy's land
Her own, yea, and her own her enemy's;
Her ships her treasures, and her treasure dross!

DIONYSUS

Good;—though it all goes down the juror's throat!

PLUTO

Come, give your judgment!

DIONYSUS

Well, I'll judge like this;
My choice shall fall on him my soul desires!

EURIPIDES

Remember all the gods by whom you swore
To take me home with you, and choose your friend!

DIONYSUS

My tongue hath sworn;—but I'll choose Aeschylus!

EURIPIDES

What have you done, you traitor?

DIONYSUS

I? I've judged
That Aeschylus gets the prize. Why shouldn't I?

EURIPIDES

Canst meet mine eyes, fresh from thy deed of shame?

DIONYSUS

What is shame, that the . . . Theatre deems no shame?

EURIPIDES

Hard heart! You mean to leave your old friend dead?

DIONYSUS

Who knoweth if to live is but to die? . . .
If breath is bread and sleep a woolly lie?

PLUTO

Come in, then, both.

DIONYSUS

Again?

PLUTO

To feast with me
Before you sail.

DIONYSUS

With pleasure! That's the way
Duly to crown a well-contented day!

CHORUS (*singing*)

O blessed are they who possess
An extra share of brains!
'Tis a fact that more or less
All fortunes of men express;
As now, by showing
An intellect glowing,
This man his home regains;
Brings benefit far and near
To all who may hold him dear,
And staunches his country's tear,—
All because of his brains!

Then never with Socrates
Make one of the row of fools

Who gabble away at ease,
Letting art and music freeze,
And freely neglect
In every respect
The drama's principal rules!
Oh, to sit in a gloomy herd
A-scraping of word on word,
All idle and all absurd,—
That is the fate of fools!

PLUTO

Then farewell, Aeschylus! Go your ways,
And save your town for happier days
By counsel wise; and a school prepare
For all the fools—there are plenty there!
And take me some parcels, I pray; this sword
Is for Cleophon; these pretty ropes for the board
Of providers. But ask them one halter to spare
For Nicomachus; one, too, is Myrmex's share.
And, along with this venomous
Draught for Archenomus,
Take them my confident prayer,
That they all will come here for a visit, and stay.
And bid them be quick; for, should they delay,
Or meet my request with ingratitude, say
I will fetch them myself, by Apollo!
And hurry the gang of them down with a run
All branded and chained—with Leucolophus' son
The sublime Adimantus to follow!

AESCHYLUS

I will do as you wish.—And as for my throne,
I beg you let Sophocles sit there alone,
On guard, till perchance I return some day,
For he—all present may mark what I say
Is my second in art and in wit.
And see, above all, that this devil-may-care
Child of deceit with his mountebank air
Shall never on that imperial chair
By the wildest of accidents sit!

PLUTO (*to the* CHORUS)

With holy torches in high display
Light ye the Marchers' triumphal advance;

Let Aeschylus' music on Aeschylus' way
Echo in song and in dance!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Peace go with him and joy in his journeying! Guide ye our poet
Forth to the light, ye powers that reign in the Earth and below it;
Send good thoughts with him, too, for the aid of a travailing nation,
So shall we rest at the last, and forget our long desolation,
War and the clashing of wrong.—And for Cleophon, why, if he'd rather,
Let him fight all alone with his friends, in the far-off fields of his father.

1. What the Greek literally says is as follows:

DIONYSUS

Don't shift your luggage pole
Across, and say, "I want to take a crap."

XANTHIAS

Nor that I've got such a weight upon my back
That unless some one helps me quickly I shall fart?

2. Any slave that had fought in this battle was set free.

3. What the Greek literally says is as follows:

DIONYSUS

I went aboard Clisthenes.

HERACLES

Did you fight?

DIONYSUS

We sank twelve or thirteen enemy ships.

HERACLES

You two?

DIONYSUS

Yes, by Apollo!

XANTHIAS (*aside*)

And then I woke up!

DIONYSUS

As I was reading the *Andromeda* on the ship, I suddenly felt my heart afire with a wish so *very* violent!

HERACLES

A wish? How big a one?

DIONYSUS

Not so big; about as large as Molon.

HERACLES

For a woman?

DIONYSUS

No.

HERACLES

For a boy, then?

DIONYSUS

Not at all.

HERACLES

For a man, then?

DIONYSUS

Faugh!

HERACLES

Were you making love to Clisthenes?

4. What Dionysus is really saying is that the inferior poets can do no more than piddle; there is none with any seminal fluid in him.

5. The diobolus had for a long time been the standard salary of Athenian public officials, but during the Peloponnesian War the demagogues had effected an increase to three obols.

6. Literally, "or made love to a boy and cheated him out of his pay."

7. One of the chief promises which the Mysteries held out to their devotees was a blissful afterlife.

8. Ophthalmia was a very common complaint in the ancient world, but it would also seem to have been used as an excuse to escape military service.

9. What the Greek literally says is as follows:

DIONYSUS

My hands are full of blisters and my arse is covered with sweat; what with all this bending over it will soon be saying . . .

FROGS

Brekekekex koäx koäx

10. For the details of what actually was said by this actor, see Hegelochus in the Glossary.

11. Pigs were sacrificed before the Mysteries.

12. Literally, "Defecates on Hecaté's shrines."

13. The reference is to those who had put through laws designed to reduce the costs and restrict the freedom of comedy.

14. Dionysus.

15. In the Greek Sebinus is called an Anaphlystian, for which see the Glossary, and, a little below, the name of the father of Callias is comically altered from Hipponicus to Hippocinus, "he who makes love to a mare."

16. What the Greek literally says is as follows:

XANTHIAS (*as soon as* AEACUS *has gone*)
What are you doing?

DIONYSUS (*squatting*)
I have crapped. Invoke the god.

This is sufficient to make the true sense of what follows quite clear. The phrase, "Invoke the god" was the usual utterance at libations.

17. What the Greek really says is: "Would it not be ridiculous if Xanthias, a slave, were stretched out on the Milesian cushions, kissing the dancing girl and asking for a thunder-mug, and I, watching all this, would be playing with my tool, etc."

18. The word of a slave was valid in Athenian courts only if given under torture. Since a man's personal servants would naturally know a great deal about his actions, it was a gesture of confident innocence to give one's slaves up to be examined under torture.

19. Whips of leek or shalott were used in certain religious rites in which ceremonial scourging took place.

20. These scapegoats were individuals whom the community chose to be the bearers of all their sins and then exiled or killed. This exceedingly primitive religious survival is reported to have been practised in various parts of Greece.

21. A parody of a verse, perhaps from the *Telephus,* of Euripides. Originally the word "Sea" stood in place of "Greens." Aristophanes never tires of twitting Euripides with the fact or fancy that his mother had sold vegetables.

22. Such animals were sacrificed to Typhon, the god of storms.

23. Euripides had at various times uttered in his plays highly anti-democratic sentiments. See, e.g., *Orestes* 902–930.

24. This exclamation is not found in *The Persians,* but various ungreek ones are, e.g., *oi, oá, ioá.*

25. Literally, "to fart in the face of the rower below and to crap on his mate, etc."

26. Literally, "they beat his belly, sides, flanks, and arse; these blows knocked such a fart out of him that it blew out his torch and he ran away."

27. "An ancient Athenian carried a cruse of olive oil about with him, both to anoint himself with after washing and to eat like butter with his

food. Naturally he was apt to lose it, especially when travelling. In my first edition I could find no object which both ancient Greeks and modern Englishmen would habitually use and lose except an umbrella. But since then motors have come in.

"The point of this famous bit of fooling is, I think, first, that Euripides' tragic style is so little elevated that oil-cans and clothes-bags are quite at home in it; secondly, that there is a certain monotony of grammatical structure in Euripides' prologues, so that you can constantly finish a sentence by a half-line with a verb in it.

"The first point, though burlesquely exaggerated, is true and important. Euripides' style, indeed, is not prosaic. It is strange that competent students of Greek tragic diction should ever have thought it so. But it is wide in its range, and uses colloquial words by the side of very romantic or archaic ones—a dangerous and difficult process, which only a great master of language can successfully carry through. Cf. the 'light weight' of his lines, below, 1365 ff.

"As to the second point, it is amusing to make out the statistics. Of the extant Greek tragedies, the following can have *lekythion apólese*, 'found his oil-can gone,' stuck on to one of the first ten lines of the prologue: Aesch. *Prom.* 8, *Sept.* 6, *Eum.* 3, and several other lines; Soph. *O. T.* 4, *El.* 5, *Trach.* 3 and 6, *Antig.* 2 and 7; Euripides, *Tro.* 10, *Hec.* 2, *Phoen.* 7, *Hclid.* 2 and 4, *Her.* 9, *Hel.* 4, *El.* 10, *I. A.* 54 (=6), and *I. T.* 2, quoted here. Thus all three tragedians have such passages in the opening of about half their extant plays, and the 'monotony,' if such it be, belongs rather to the style of the tragic prologue than to Euripides."—Gilbert Murray.

28. It should be noted that in the Greek this refrain does not change, but becomes increasingly meaningless in each new context.

29. The singing of more than one note for a single syllable seems to have been very late in making its appearance in Greek music, and this passage testifies to the fact that in Aristophanes' time it must have been regarded as something very new and daring.

X

THE ECCLESIAZUSAE

Characters in the Play

Praxagora
Blepyrus, *husband of Praxagora*
Women
A Man
Chremes
A Citizen
Herald
A Girl
A Young Man
Three Old Women
A Servant Maid *to* Praxagora
Chorus of Women

INTRODUCTION

BETWEEN *The Frogs* (405) and *The Ecclesiazusae* (392) there is a gap of thirteen years during which we know next to nothing of Aristophanes' literary productions; it is abundantly clear that he did a great deal of writing in these years, but none of it has come down to us, and we are quite unable to form any notion of the nature or the quality of the work that he did at this time. Now it happens that the period 405–392 witnessed a number of events in the history of Athens which were either decisive or significant for her future development. The disaster of Aegospotami was followed in rapid succession by the siege and surrender of the city, the destruction of the walls, the second oligarchical revolution, the reign of terror under the Thirty, and the final triumph of Thrasybulus with the resultant restoration of the democracy and the proclamation of a generous amnesty. A few years later came the trial and the execution of Socrates, and the epoch designated, not without invidious overtones, as the fourth century had evidently begun long before 392. The cultural differences, really qualitative, but often perversely conceived in quantitative terms, between this century and its immediate predecessor inevitably prejudice the reader of the two latest of the plays of Aristophanes, and the mere fact that they were written after 400 condemns them beforehand in the eyes of the excusably partisan or culpably myopic lover of fifth-century Athenian civilization. Even a casual reading of *The Ecclesiazusae* discovers the absence of the parabasis and the reduced importance of the Chorus, but a more intimate acquaintance with the play reveals that within a changed form the poet is still Aristophanes; his best years are behind him, but his dotage, if he ever had any, lies in the far distant future.

There is much in the play that is reminiscent of *Lysistrata*, and if *The Frogs* suggests a successful production of *The Thesmophoriazusae*, *The Ecclesiazusae* may furnish similar, if less cogent, evidence of an earlier victory in 411. In *Lysistrata* we witness the women of Athens effecting a successful revolution to put an end to the war; *The Ecclesiazusae* we find their seizure of power establishing community of property as a

panacea for all the social and economic ills which beset Athens in the first two decades of the fourth century. Thus an Utopian subject and a feminine insurrection permit us to deduce a twofold legacy from both *The Birds* and *Lysistrata,* but the similarities to the latter are more numerous and more specific.

The initial scene is the most remarkable of these, for when the play opens we are presented with the revolutionary leader Praxagora anxiously awaiting the arrival of her fellow conspirators, who have promised to meet her here, in front of her house, at this time. One by one they put in an appearance, and when their number is finally complete, Praxagora instructs and exercises them in the proper and masculine mode of behaviour in the Assembly. As soon as they have satisfied her that they will not betray their sex and thwart her purposes, they don the clothes they have filched from their husbands, attach the false beards they have secretly procured, and Praxagora leads them off to the Assembly, where they hope to seize the helm of state and establish the new order of society.

Immediately after their departure a distressed and ludicrous figure emerges from the house; it is Blepyrus, the husband of Praxagora, whom an urgent need to defecate has driven outdoors wearing his wife's clothes, the only garments which the confused and harassed man has been able to find in the dark. Soon a friend of his, with the prophetic name of Chremes, appears, newly returned from the Assembly, and reports the extraordinary enactments that have just been adopted. The session was unusually well attended, and a great multitude of pale-faced persons, looking like shoemakers, had arrived early and preëmpted the front seats. One of their number, a very beautiful young man, made an eloquent and persuasive speech, in which he proposed that the direction of public affairs be entrusted to the women of the state, and the motion was carried amidst the enthusiastic plaudits of the shoemakers. "It's the one and only innovation that has *not* yet been tried at Athens," remarks Aristophanes, under the mask of Chremes, and we remember that the poet has lived through a lot of history. Blepyrus is delighted with the vision of the luxurious and indolent life he is henceforth to lead, and the two friends part just before Praxagora and the women who form the Chorus return from their legislative adventure. They fortunately have sufficient time to discard their masculine disguises before the reappearance of Blepyrus, who gratuitously informs his wife of the developments in the Assembly. She soon takes the lead in the conversation, and proceeds to explain the operation and to demonstrate the perfection of the new organization of society. The ductile Blepyrus is easily converted, and, entranced by the prospect of being pointed out as the husband of the dictator, he follows his wife to the market-place, where she is to supervise the redistribution of property. We might expect a parabasis at this point, but the manu-

scripts of the play merely indicate that the Chorus performed a dance, and we are forcibly reminded that we are in the Fourth Century.

In the scene which follows, we find a highly witty dialogue between Chremes, who has arranged his property in a travesty of a sacred procession and intends to devote it to the common store, and a nameless citizen who adopts a thoroughly sceptical attitude toward the new order, preferring to wait and see how the others act. The arrival, however, of a female herald to announce a sumptuous feast provided by the state puts a new complexion on things, and the wily citizen, proposing to share the benefits without assuming any of the burdens of the new economy, follows Chremes to the public banquet.

The community of property established by the revolutionaries is to apply not only to material things but also to the relationships between the sexes. The women are not, however, unaware that the economy of free love cannot be allowed to operate on the principle of *laissez-faire,* and have consequently decreed that the old and the unattractive are to have prior rights over the young and the beautiful. The final scene of the comedy exhibits a specimen case of the practical workings of this arrangement. The two houses of the stage-setting are now those of two prostitutes, the one youthful and alluring, the other all too liberally endowed with years and cosmetics. A young man who finds himself strongly attracted to the girl is horrified to discover that he must satisfy the demands of the old woman first, but his arguments and his resistance are entirely fruitless; the law must be obeyed and he resigns himself to the inevitable. Just as he is about to enter the old woman's house he is rescued by the girl, but his joy is not destined to endure, and the unfortunate fellow is almost immediately set upon by a woman far older and much more hideous than the first. His youthful rescuer retires from the unequal contest, but just as the second old woman is taking him home with her, a voice from behind demands where she is going. The young man invokes blessings on his unknown saviour's head, only to discover that it is a third old woman, frightful beyond belief; and he is now dragged off by two harridans, one on each arm. Their contesting claims are left unsettled, and the play ends with an appeal to the judges and the departure of the Chorus for the feast.

The Utopia established by Praxagora bears so remarkable a resemblance to the ideal state described in Plato's *Republic* that the precise nature of the obvious connection between the comedy and the Dialogue has been the subject of much discussion. The chronological difficulty arising from the fact that *The Republic* cannot have been published until about twenty years after *The Ecclesiazusae* leaves us a choice of two explanations, since no one wishes to assume that the philosopher's theories were derived from the dramatist's caricatures It may be that community

of property had already been suggested as a social and economic panacea, but it seems more reasonable to suppose that the ideas presented in *The Republic* were known for some time before their final publication.

The Ecclesiazusae is far from being one of the best of Aristophanes' comedies, and its form is more suggestive of the Middle than of the Old Comedy, but it presents an amusing subject treated with great wit in a play that is very well constructed, and its faults are those of its time rather than of its author. Much of the adverse criticism which has been levelled against it has been motivated by prudery, and a puritanical hostility has sought and unfortunately been able to find a number of minor flaws which give a specious validity to an unreasoning prejudice. When we approach it rationally and candidly we are pleasantly surprised to discover that it is a far better play than we had been led to expect.

THE ECCLESIAZUSAE

(SCENE:—*The Orchestra represents a public square in Athens; in the background are two houses with an alley between them.*)

PRAXAGORA

(*swinging the lantern, which is to be a signal for the other women; in high tragic style*)

OH! THOU shining light of my earthenware lamp, from this high spot shalt thou look abroad. Oh! lamp, I will tell thee thine origin and thy future; 'tis the rapid whirl of the potter's wheel that has lent thee thy shape, and thy wick counterfeits the glory of the sun; mayst thou send the agreed signal flashing afar! In thee alone do we confide, and thou art worthy, for thou art near us when we practise the various postures in which Aphrodité delights upon our couches, and none dreams even in the midst of her sports of seeking to avoid thine eye that watches us. Thou alone shinest into the secret recesses of our thighs and dost singe the hair that groweth there, and with thy flame dost light the actions of our loves. If we open some cellar stored with fruits and wine, thou art our companion, and never dost thou betray or reveal to a neighbour the secrets thou hast learned about us. Therefore thou shalt know likewise the whole of the plot that I have planned with my friends, the women, at the festival of the Scirophoria.

(*She pauses and looks about her*)

I see none of those I was expecting, though dawn approaches; the Assembly is about to gather and we must take our seats in spite of Phyromachus, who forsooth would say, "It is meet the women sit apart and hidden from the eyes of the men." Why, have they not been able then to procure the false beards that they must wear, or to steal their husbands' cloaks? Ah! I see a light approaching; let us draw somewhat aside, for fear it should be a man.

(*She hides in the alley. From the right a woman enters, followed almost immediately by others. All are carrying staffs, men's sandals, and cloaks over their arms.*)

FIRST WOMAN

Let us start, it is high time; as we left our dwellings, the cock was crowing for the second time.

PRAXAGORA (*to herself*)

And I have spent the whole night waiting for you. (*She emerges from the alley.*) But come, let us call our neighbour by scratching at her door; and gently too, so that her husband may hear nothing.

SECOND WOMAN

(*coming out of her house; she is dressed like a man, with a staff in her hand*)

I was putting on my shoes, when I heard you scratching, for I was not asleep, so there! Oh! my dear, my husband (he is a Salaminian) never left me an instant's peace, but was at me, for ever at me, all night long, so that it was only just now that I was able to filch his cloak.

PRAXAGORA

I see Clinareté coming too, along with Sostraté and their next-door neighbour Philaeneté. (*To the women that are just arriving; in a loud voice*) Hurry yourselves then, for Glycé has sworn that the last comer shall forfeit three measures of wine and a *choenix* of pease.

SECOND WOMAN

Don't you see Melisticé, the wife of Smicythion, hurrying hither in her big shoes? I think she is the only one of us all who has had no trouble in getting rid of her husband.

FIRST WOMAN

And can't you see Geusistraté, the tavern-keeper's wife, with a lamp in her hand?

PRAXAGORA

And the wives of Philodoretus and Chaeretades, and a great many others; all the useful people in the city, in fact.

THIRD WOMAN

Oh! my dear, I have had such trouble in getting away! My husband ate such a surfeit of sprats last evening that he was coughing and choking the whole night long.

PRAXAGORA

Take your seats, and, since you are all gathered here at last, let us see if what we decided on at the feast of the Scirophoria has been duly done.

FIRST WOMAN

Yes. Firstly, as agreed, I have let the hair under my armpits grow thicker than a bush, furthermore, whilst my husband was at the Assembly, I rubbed myself from head to foot with oil and then stood the whole day long in the sun.

SECOND WOMAN

So did I. I began by throwing away my razor, so that I might get quite hairy, and no longer resemble a woman.

PRAXAGORA

Have you the beards that we had all to get ourselves for the Assembly?

FIRST WOMAN

Yea, by Hecaté! Is this not a fine one?

SECOND WOMAN

Aye, much finer even than the one Epicrates has.

PRAXAGORA (*to the other women*)

And you?

FIRST WOMAN

Yes, yes; look, they all nod assent.

PRAXAGORA

I see that you have got all the rest too, Spartan shoes, staffs and men's cloaks, as it was arranged.

FIRST WOMAN

I have brought Lamias' club, which I stole from him while he slept.

PRAXAGORA

What, the club that makes him fart with its weight?

SECOND WOMAN

By Zeus the Deliverer, if he had the skin of Argus, he would know better than any other how to shepherd the popular herd.

PRAXAGORA

But come, let us finish what has yet to be done, while the stars are still shining; the Assembly, at which we mean to be present, will open at dawn.

FIRST WOMAN

Good; you must take up your place at the foot of the platform and facing the Prytanes.

SECOND WOMAN

I have brought this with me to card during the Assembly.

(*She shows some wool.*)

PRAXAGORA

During the Assembly, wretched woman?

SECOND WOMAN

Surely, by Artemis! shall I hear any less well if I am doing a bit of carding? My little ones are all but naked.

PRAXAGORA

Think of her wanting to card! whereas we must not let anyone see the smallest part of our bodies.[1] 'Twould be a fine thing if one of us, in the midst of the discussion, rushed on to the speaker's platform and, flinging her cloak aside, showed her Phormisius. If, on the other hand, we are the first to take our seats closely muffled in our cloaks, none will know us. Let us fix these beards on our chins, so that they spread all over our bosoms. How can we fail then to be mistaken for men? Agyrrhius has deceived everyone, thanks to the beard of Pronomus; yet he was no better than a woman, and you see how he now holds the first position in the city. Thus, I adjure you by this day that is about to dawn, let us dare to copy him and let us be clever enough to possess ourselves of the management of affairs. Let us save the ship of state, which just at present none seems able either to sail or row.

FIRST WOMAN (*in a tragic style*)

But where shall we find orators in an Assembly of women?

PRAXAGORA

Nothing simpler. Is it not said that the cleverest speakers are those who get made love to most often? Well, thanks to the gods, we are that by nature.

FIRST WOMAN

There's no doubt of that; but the worst of it is our inexperience.

PRAXAGORA

That's the very reason we are gathered here, in order to prepare the speech we must make in the Assembly. Hasten, therefore, all you who know aught of speaking, to fix on your beards.

SECOND WOMAN

Oh! you stupid thing! is there ever a one among us cannot use her tongue?

PRAXAGORA

Come, look sharp, on with your beard and become a man. As for me, I will do the same in case I should have a fancy for getting on to the platform. Here are the chaplets.

(*They all put on their beards.*)

SECOND WOMAN

Oh! great gods! my dear Praxagora, do look here! Is it not laughable?

PRAXAGORA

How laughable?

SECOND WOMAN

Our beards look like broiled cuttle-fishes.

PRAXAGORA (*pretending to be the herald*)

Priest, bring in the cat.[a] Step forward, please! Silence, Ariphrades! Go and take your seat. Now, who wishes to speak?

SECOND WOMAN

I do.

PRAXAGORA

Then put on this chaplet and success be with you.

SECOND WOMAN

There!

PRAXAGORA

Well then! begin.

SECOND WOMAN

Before drinking?

PRAXAGORA

Hah! she wants to drink!

SECOND WOMAN

Why, what else is the meaning of this chaplet?

PRAXAGORA

Get you hence! you would probably have played us this trick also before the people.

SECOND WOMAN

Well! don't the men drink then in the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA

Now she's telling us the men drink!

SECOND WOMAN

Yes, by Artemis, and neat wine too. That's why their decrees breathe of drunkenness and madness. And why libations, why so many ceremonies, if wine plays no part in them? Besides, they abuse each other like drunken men, and you can see the archers dragging more than one uproarious drunkard out of the market-place.

PRAXAGORA

Go back to your seat, you are wandering.

SECOND WOMAN (*returning to her seat*)

Ah! I should have done better not to have muffled myself in this beard; my throat's afire and I feel I shall die of thirst.

PRAXAGORA

Who else wishes to speak?

FIRST WOMAN (*rising*)

I do.

PRAXAGORA

Quick then, take the chaplet; the time's running short. Try to speak worthily, let your language be truly manly, and lean on your staff with dignity.

FIRST WOMAN

I had rather have seen one of your regular orators giving you wise advice; but, as that is not to be, it behoves me to break silence; I cannot, for my part indeed, allow the tavern-keepers to fill up their wine-pits with water. No, by the two goddesses . . .

PRAXAGORA

What? by the two goddesses! [4] Wretched woman, where are your senses?

FIRST WOMAN

Eh! what? . . . I have not asked you for a drink.

PRAXAGORA

No, but you want to pass for a man, and you swear by the two goddesses. Otherwise you did very well.

FIRST WOMAN

Well then. By Apollo . . .

PRAXAGORA

Stop! All these details of language must be adjusted; else it is quite useless to go to the Assembly.

FIRST WOMAN

Give me back the chaplet; I wish to speak again, for I think I have got hold of something good. You women who are listening to me . . .

PRAXAGORA

Women again; why, you wretched creature, it's men that you are addressing.

FIRST WOMAN

That's the fault of Epigonus, I caught sight of him way over there, and I thought I was speaking to women.

PRAXAGORA

Come, withdraw and remain seated in the future. I am going to take this chaplet myself and speak in your name. May the gods grant success to my plans!

My country is as dear to me as it is to you, and I groan, I am grieved at all that is happening in it. Scarcely one in ten of those who rule it is honest, and all the others are bad. If you appoint fresh chiefs, they will do still worse. It is hard to correct your peevish humour; you fear those who love you and throw yourselves at the feet of those who betray you. There was a time when we had no assemblies, and then we all thought Agyrrhius a dishonest man; now they are established, he who gets money thinks everything is as it should be, and he who does not, declares all who sell their votes to be worthy of death.

SECOND WOMAN

By Aphrodité, that is well spoken.

PRAXAGORA

Why, wretched woman, you have actually called upon Aphrodité. Oh! what a fine thing it would have been if you had said that in the Assembly!

SECOND WOMAN

But I would not have done it then.

PRAXAGORA

Well, mind you don't fall into the habit. (*Resuming the oratorical manner*) When we were discussing the alliance,[5] it seemed as though it were all over with Athens if it fell through. No sooner was it made than we were vexed and angry, and the orator who had caused its adoption was compelled to seek safety in flight. Is there talk of equipping a fleet?

The poor man says, yes, but the rich citizen and the countryman say, no. You were angered against the Corinthians and they with you; now they are well disposed towards you, be so towards them. As a rule the Argives are dull, but the Argive Hieronymus is a distinguished chief. Herein lies a spark of hope; but Thrasybulus is far from Athens and you do not recall him.

SECOND WOMAN

Oh! what a brilliant man!

PRAXAGORA (*to her*)

That's better! that's fitting applause. (*Continuing her speech*) Citizens, you are the ones who are the cause of all this trouble. You vote yourselves salaries out of the public funds and care only for your own personal interests; hence the state limps along like Aesimus. But if you hearken to me, you will be saved. I assert that the direction of affairs must be handed over to the women, for they are the ones who have charge and look after our households.

ALL THE WOMEN

Very good, very good, that's perfect! Go on, go on.

PRAXAGORA (*ignoring this interruption*)

They are worth more than you are, as I shall prove. First of all they wash all their wool in warm water, according to the ancient practice; you will never see them changing their method. Ah! if Athens only acted thus, if it did not take delight in ceaseless innovations, would not its happiness be assured? Then the women sit down to cook, just as they always did; they carry things on their head just as they always did; they keep the Thesmophoria, just as they always did; they knead their cakes just as they always did; they make their husbands angry just as they always did; they receive their lovers in their houses just as they always did; they buy dainties just as they always did; they love unmixed wine just as they always did; they delight in being loved just as they always did. Let us therefore hand Athens over to them without endless discussions, without bothering ourselves about what they will do; let us simply hand them over the power, remembering that they are mothers and will therefore spare the blood of our soldiers; besides, who will know better than a mother how to forward provisions to the front? Woman is adept at getting money for herself and will not easily let herself be deceived; she understands deceit too well herself. I omit a thousand other advantages. Take my advice and you will live in perfect happiness.

FIRST WOMAN

How beautiful this is, my dearest Praxagora, how clever! But where, pray, did you learn all these pretty things?

PRAXAGORA

When the countryfolk were seeking refuge in the city,[6] I lived on the Pnyx with my husband, and there I learnt to speak through listening to the orators.

FIRST WOMAN

Then, dear, it's not astonishing that you are so eloquent and clever; henceforward you shall be our leader, so put your great ideas into execution. But if Cephalus belches forth insults against you, what answer will you give him in the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA

I shall say that he is drivelling

FIRST WOMAN

But all the world knows that.

PRAXAGORA

I shall furthermore say that he is a raving madman.

FIRST WOMAN

There's nobody who does not know that.

PRAXAGORA

That he, as excellent a statesman as he is, is a clumsy potter.

FIRST WOMAN

And if the blear-eyed Neoclides comes to insult you?

PRAXAGORA

To him I shall say, "Go and look at a dog's arse."

FIRST WOMAN

And if they fly at you?

PRAXAGORA

Oh! I shall shake them off as best I can; never fear, I know how to use this tool.[7]

FIRST WOMAN

But there is one thing we don't think of. If the Scythians drag you away, what will you do?

PRAXAGORA

With my arms akimbo like this, I will never, never let myself be taken round the middle.

FIRST WOMAN

If they seize you, we will bid them let you go.

SECOND WOMAN

That's the best way. But how are we going to remember to lift our arms in the Assembly when it's our legs we are used to lifting?

PRAXAGORA

It's difficult; yet it must be done, and the arm shown naked to the shoulder in order to vote. Quick now, put on these tunics and these Laconian shoes, as you see the men do each time they go to the Assembly or for a walk. When this is done, fix on your beards, and when they are arranged in the best way possible, dress yourselves in the cloaks you have stolen from your husbands; finally start off, leaning on your staffs and singing some old man's song as the villagers do.

FIRST WOMAN

Well spoken; and let us hurry to get to the Pnyx before the women from the country, for they will no doubt not fail to come there.

PRAXAGORA

Quick, quick, for it's the custom that those who are not at the Pnyx early in the morning return home empty-handed.

(PRAXAGORA *and the* FIRST *and* SECOND WOMEN *depart; those who are left behind form the* CHORUS.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Move forward, citizens, move forward; let us not forget to give ourselves this name and may that of *woman* never slip out of our mouths; woe to us, if it were discovered that we had laid such a plot in the darkness of night.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Let us go to the Assembly then, fellow-citizens; for the Thesmothetes have declared that only those who arrive at daybreak with haggard eye and covered with dust, without having snatched time to eat anything but a snack of garlic-pickle, shall alone receive the triobolus. Walk up smartly, Charitimides, Smicythus and Draces, and do not fail in any point of your part; let us first demand our fee and then vote for all that may perchance be useful for our partisans. . . . Ah! what am I saying? I meant to say, for our fellow-

citizens. Let us drive away these men of the city who used to stay at home and chatter round the table in the days when only an obolus was paid, whereas now one is stifled by the crowds at the Pnyx. No! during the archonship of generous Myronides, none would have dared to let himself be paid for the trouble he spent over public business; each one brought his own meal of bread, a couple of onions, three olives and some wine in a little wine-skin. But nowadays we run here to earn the three obols, for the citizen has become as mercenary as the stonemason.

(*The* CHORUS *marches away.* BLEPYRUS *appears in the doorway of his house, wearing* PRAXAGORA'S *Persian sandals and saffron robe.*)

BLEPYRUS

What does this mean? My wife has vanished! it is nearly daybreak and she does not return! I had to take a crap! I woke up and hunted in the darkness for my shoes and my cloak, but grope where I would, I couldn't find them. Meanwhile Mr. O'Shit [8] was already knocking on the door and I had only just time to seize my wife's little mantle and her Persian slippers. But where shall I find a place where I *can* take a crap? Bah! One place is as good as another at night-time, no one will see me. Ah! what a damned fool I was to take a wife at my age, and how I could thrash myself for having acted so stupidly! It's certainty she's not gone out for any honest purpose. But the thing to do now is to take a crap.

(*He squats.*)

A MAN (*looking out of the window of the house next door*)

Who's that? Is that not my neighbour Blepyrus? Why, yes, it's no other. Tell me, what's all that yellow about you? Can it be Cinesias who has befouled you so?

BLEPYRUS

No, no, I only slipped on my wife's tunic to come out in.

MAN

And where is your cloak?

BLEPYRUS

I cannot tell you; I hunted for it vainly on the bed.

MAN

And why did you not ask your wife for it?

BLEPYRUS

Ah! why indeed! because she is not in the house; she has run away, and I greatly fear that she may be doing me an ill turn.

MAN

But, by Posidon, it's the same with myself. My wife has disappeared with my cloak, and what is still worse, with my shoes as well; I cannot find them anywhere.

BLEPYRUS

Nor can I my Laconian ones; but as I urgently needed to crap, I popped my feet into these slippers, so as not to soil my blanket, which is brand new.

MAN

What does it mean? Can some friend have invited her to a feast?

BLEPYRUS

I expect so, for she does not generally misconduct herself, as far as I know.

MAN

What are you doing, making well-ropes? Are you never going to be done? As for myself, I would like to go to the Assembly, and it is time to start, but I've got to find my cloak; I have only one

BLEPYRUS

I am going to have a look too, when I have finished crapping; but I really think there must be a wild pear obstructing my rectum.

MAN

Is it the one which Thrasybulus spoke about to the Lacedaemonians?

BLEPYRUS

Oh! oh! oh! how stopped up I am! Whatever am I to do? It's not merely for the present that I am frightened; but when I have eaten, where is my crap to find an outlet now? This damned McPear [9] fellow has bolted the door. Call a doctor; but who is the cleverest in this branch of the science? Amynon? Perhaps he would not come. Ah! Antisthenes! Let him be brought to me, cost what it will. To judge by his noisy sighs, that man knows what an arse wants, when it needs to crap. Oh! venerated Ilithyia! I shall burst unless the door gives way. Have pity! pity! Let me not become a thunder-mug for the comic poets.

(*Enter* CHREMES, *returning from the Assembly.*)

CHREMES

Hi! friend, what are you doing there? You're not crapping, are you?

BLEPYRUS (*finding relief at last*)

Oh! there! it is over and I can get up again.

CHREMES

What's this? You have your wife's tunic on.

BLEPYRUS

It was the first thing that came to my hand in the darkness. But where are you coming from?

CHREMES

From the Assembly.

BLEPYRUS

Is it already over then?

CHREMES

Certainly.

BLEPYRUS

Why, it is scarcely daylight.

CHREMES

I did laugh, ye gods, at the vermilion rope-marks that were to be seen all about the Assembly.[10]

BLEPYRUS

Did you get the triobolus?

CHREMES

Would it had so pleased the gods! but I arrived just too late, and am quite ashamed of it; I bring back nothing but this empty wallet.

BLEPYRUS

But why is that?

CHREMES

There was a crowd, such as has never been seen at the Pnyx, and the folk looked pale and wan, like so many shoemakers, so white were they in hue; both I and many another had to go without the triobolus.

BLEPYRUS

Then if I went now, I should get nothing.

CHREMES

No, certainly not, nor even had you gone at the second cock-crow.

BLEPYRUS

Oh! what a misfortune! "Oh, Antilochus! no triobolus! Even death would be better! I am undone!" But what can have attracted such a crowd at that early hour?

CHREMES

The Prytanes started the discussion of measures closely concerning the safety of the state; immediately, that blear-eyed fellow, the son of Neoclides, was the first to mount the platform. Then the folk shouted with their loudest voice, "What! he dares to speak, and that, too, when the safety of the state is concerned, and he a man who has not known how to save even his own eyebrows!" He, however, shouted louder than all of them, and looking at them asked, "Why, what ought I to have done?"

BLEPYRUS

Pound together garlic and laserpitium juice, add to this mixture some Laconian spurge, and rub it well into the eyelids at night. That's what I should have answered, had I been there.

CHREMES

After him that clever rascal Evaeon began to speak; he was naked, so far as we all could see, but he declared he had a cloak; he propounded the most popular, the most democratic, doctrines. "You see," he said, "I have the greatest need of sixteen drachmae, the cost of a new cloak, my health demands it; nevertheless I wish first to care for that of my fellow-citizens and of my country. If the fullers were to supply tunics to the indigent at the approach of winter, none would be exposed to pleurisy. Let him who has neither beds nor coverlets go to sleep at the tanners' after taking a bath; and if they shut the door in winter, let them be condemned to give him three goat-skins."

BLEPYRUS

By Dionysus, a fine, a very fine notion! Not a soul will vote against his proposal, especially if he adds that the flour-sellers must supply the poor with three measures of corn, or else suffer the severest penalties of the law; this is the only way Nausicydes can be of any use to us.

CHREMES

Then we saw a handsome young man rush into the tribune, he was all pink and white like young Nicias, and he began to say that the direction of matters should be entrusted to the women; this the crowd of shoemakers began applauding with all their might, while the country-folk assailed him with groans.

BLEPYRUS

And, indeed, they did well.

CHREMES

But they were outnumbered, and the orator shouted louder than they, saying much good of the women and much ill of you.

BLEPYRUS (*eagerly*)

And what did he say?

CHREMES

First he said you were a rogue . . .

BLEPYRUS

And you?

CHREMES

Wait a minute! . . . and a thief .

BLEPYRUS

I alone?

CHREMES

And an informer.

BLEPYRUS

I alone?

CHREMES

Why, no, by the gods! this whole crowd here.

(*He points to the audience.*)

BLEPYRUS

And who avers the contrary?

CHREMES

He maintained that women were both clever and thrifty, that they never divulged the Mysteries of Demeter, while you and I go about babbling incessantly about whatever happens at the Senate.

BLEPYRUS

By Hermes, he was not lying!

CHREMES

Then he added that the women lend each other clothes, trinkets of gold and silver, drinking-cups, and not before witnesses too, but all by themselves, and that they return everything with exactitude without ever cheating each other; whereas, according to him, *we* are ever ready to deny the loans we have effected

BLEPYRUS

Yes, by Posidon, and in spite of witnesses.

CHREMES

Again, he said that women were not informers, nor did they bring lawsuits, nor hatch conspiracies; in short, he praised the women in every possible manner.

BLEPYRUS

And what was decided?

CHREMES

To confide the direction of affairs to them; it's the one and only innovation that has *not* yet been tried at Athens.

BLEPYRUS

And it was voted?

CHREMES

Yes.

BLEPYRUS

And everything that used to be the men's concern has been given over to the women?

CHREMES

You express it exactly.

BLEPYRUS

Thus it will be my wife who will go to the courts now in my stead?

CHREMES

And it will be she who will keep your children in your place.

BLEPYRUS

I shall no longer have to tire myself out with work from daybreak onwards?

CHREMES

No, 'twill be the women's business, and you can stay at home and amuse yourself with farting the whole day through.

BLEPYRUS

Well, what I fear for us fellows now is, that, holding the reins of government, they will forcibly compel us . . .

CHREMES

To do what?

BLEPYRUS

. . . to lay them.

CHREMES

And if we are not able?

BLEPYRUS

They will give us no dinner.

CHREMES

Well then, do your duty; dinner and love-making form a double enjoyment.

BLEPYRUS

Ah! but I hate compulsion.

CHREMES

But if it is for the public good, let us resign ourselves. It's an old saying that our absurdest and maddest decrees always somehow turn out for our good. May it be so in this case, oh gods, oh venerable Pallas! But I must be off; so, good-bye to you!
(*Exit.*)

BLEPYRUS

Good-bye, Chremes.

(*He goes back into his house.*)

CHORUS (*returning from the Assembly, still dressed like men; singing*)

March along, go forward. Is there some man following us? Turn round, examine everywhere and keep a good look-out; be on your guard against every trick, for they might spy on us from behind. Let us make as much noise as possible as we tramp. It would be a disgrace for all of us if we allowed ourselves to be caught in this deed by the men. Come, wrap yourselves up well, and search both right and left, so that no mischance may happen to us. Let us hasten our steps; here we are close to the meeting-place whence we started for the Assembly, and here is the house of our leader, the author of this bold scheme, which is now decreed by all the citizens. Let us not lose a moment in taking off our false beards, for we might be recognized and denounced. Let us stand under the shadow of this wall; let us glance round sharply with our eye to beware of surprises, while we quickly resume our ordinary dress. Ah! here is our leader, returning from the Assembly. Hasten to relieve your chins of these flowing manes. Look at your comrades yonder; they have already made themselves women again some while ago.

(*They remove the beards as* PRAXAGORA *and the other women enter from the right through the Orchestra.*)

PRAXAGORA

Friends, success has crowned our plans. But off with these cloaks and these boots quick, before any man sees you; unbuckle the Laconian straps and get rid of your staffs; (*to the* LEADER) and you help them with their toilet. As for myself, I am going to slip quietly into the house and replace my husband's cloak and other gear where I took them from, before he can suspect anything.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There! it's done according to your bidding. Now tell us how we can be of service to you, so that we may show you our obedience, for we have never seen a cleverer woman than you.

PRAXAGORA

Wait! I only wish to use the power given me in accordance with your wishes, for, in the market-place, in the midst of the shouts and danger, I appreciated your indomitable courage.

(*Just as she is about to enter the house* BLEPYRUS *appears in the doorway.*)

BLEPYRUS

Eh, Praxagora! where are you coming from?

PRAXAGORA

How does that concern you, dear?

BLEPYRUS

Why, greatly! what a silly question!

PRAXAGORA

You don't think I have come from a lover's?

BLEPYRUS

No, perhaps not from only one.

PRAXAGORA

You can make yourself sure of that.

BLEPYRUS

And how?

PRAXAGORA

You can see whether my hair smells of perfume.

BLEPYRUS

What? cannot a woman possibly be laid without perfume, eh!

PRAXAGORA

The gods forfend, as far as I am concerned.

BLEPYRUS

Why did you go off at early dawn with my cloak?

PRAXAGORA

A companion, a friend who was in labour, had sent to fetch me.

BLEPYRUS

Could you not have told me?

PRAXAGORA

Oh, my dear, would you have me caring nothing for a poor woman in that plight?

BLEPYRUS

A word would have been enough. There's something behind all this.

PRAXAGORA

No, I call the goddesses to witness! I went running off; the poor woman who summoned me begged me to come, whatever might betide.

BLEPYRUS

And why did you not take *your* mantle? Instead of that, you carry off mine, you throw your dress upon the bed and you leave me as the dead are left, bar the chaplets and perfumes.

PRAXAGORA

It was cold, and I am frail and delicate; I took your cloak for greater warmth, leaving you thoroughly warm yourself beneath your coverlets.

BLEPYRUS

And my shoes and staff, those too went off with you?

PRAXAGORA

I was afraid they might rob me of the cloak, and so, to look like a man, I put on your shoes and walked with a heavy tread and struck the stones with your staff.

BLEPYRUS

D'you know you have made us lose a *sextary* of wheat, which I should have bought with the triobolus of the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA

Be comforted, for she had a boy.

BLEPYRUS

Who? the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA

No, no, the woman I helped. But has the Assembly taken place then?

BLEPYRUS

Did I not tell you of it yesterday?

PRAXAGORA

True; I remember now.

BLEPYRUS

And don't you know the decrees that have been voted?

PRAXAGORA

No indeed.

BLEPYRUS

Go to! you can live on lobster from now on, for they say the government is handed over to you.

PRAXAGORA

To do what—to spin?

BLEPYRUS

No, that you may rule . . .

PRAXAGORA

What?

BLEPYRUS

. . . over all public business.

PRAXAGORA (*as she exclaims this* CHREMES *reappears*)

Oh! by Aphrodité! how happy Athens will be!

BLEPYRUS

Why so?

PRAXAGORA

For a thousand reasons. None will dare now to do shameless deeds, to give false testimony or lay informations.

BLEPYRUS

Stop! in the name of the gods! Do you want me to die of hunger?

CHREMES

Good sir, let your wife speak.

PRAXAGORA

There will be no more thieves, nor envious people, no more rags nor misery, no more abuse and no more prosecutions and law-suits.

CHREMES

By Posidon! that's grand, if it's true!

PRAXAGORA

I shall prove it and you shall be my witness and even he (*pointing to Blepyrus*) will have no objections to raise.

CHORUS (*singing*)

You have served your friends, but now it behoves you to apply your ability and your care to the welfare of the people. Devote the fecundity of your mind to the public weal; adorn the citizens' lives with a thousand enjoyments and teach them to seize every favourable opportunity. Devise some ingenious method to secure the much-needed salvation of Athens; but let neither your acts nor your words recall anything of the past, for 'tis only innovations that please.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But do not fail to put your plans into execution immediately; it's quick action that pleases the audience.

PRAXAGORA

I believe my ideas are good, but what I fear is that the public will cling to the old customs and refuse to accept my reforms.

CHREMES

Have no fear about that. Love of novelty and disdain for traditions, these are the dominating principles among us.

PRAXAGORA (*to the audience*)

Let none contradict nor interrupt me until I have explained my plan. I want all to have a share of everything and all property to be in common; there will no longer be either rich or poor; no longer shall we see one man harvesting vast tracts of land, while another has not ground enough to be buried in, nor one man surround himself with a whole army of slaves, while another has not a single attendant; I intend that there shall only be one and the same condition of life for all.

BLEPYRUS

But how do you mean for all?

PRAXAGORA (*impatiently*)

You'll eat dung before I do! [11]

BLEPYRUS

Won't the dung be common too?

PRAXAGORA

No, no, but you interrupted me too soon. This is what I was going to say: I shall begin by making land, money, everything that is private property, common to all. Then we shall live on this common wealth, which we shall take care to administer with wise thrift

BLEPYRUS

And how about the man who has no land, but only gold and silver coins, that cannot be seen?

PRAXAGORA

He must bring them to the common stock, and if he fails he will be a perjured man.

BLEPYRUS

That won't worry him much, for has he not gained them by perjury?

PRAXAGORA

But his riches will no longer be of any use to him.

BLEPYRUS

Why?

PRAXAGORA

The poor will no longer be obliged to work; each will have all that he needs, bread, salt fish, cakes, tunics, wine, chaplets and chick-pease; of what advantage will it be to him not to contribute his share to the common wealth? What do you think of it?

BLEPYRUS

But is it not the biggest robbers that have all these things?

CHREMES

Yes, formerly, under the old order of things; but now that all goods are in common, what will he gain by not bringing his wealth into the general stock?

BLEPYRUS

If someone saw a pretty wench and wished to lay her, he would take some of his reserve store to make her a present and stay the night with her; this would not prevent him claiming his share of the common property.

PRAXAGORA

But he can sleep with her for nothing; I intend that women shall belong to all men in common, and each shall beget children by any man that wishes to have her.

BLEPYRUS

But all will go to the prettiest woman and try to lay her.

PRAXAGORA

The ugliest and the most flat-nosed will be side by side with the most charming, and to win the latter's favours, a man will first have to get into the former.

BLEPYRUS

But what about us oldsters? If we have to lay the old women first, how can we keep our tools from failing before we get into the Promised Land?

PRAXAGORA

They will make no resistance. Never fear; they will make no resistance.

BLEPYRUS

Resistance to what?

PRAXAGORA

To the pleasure of the thing. This is the way that matters will be ordered for you.

BLEPYRUS

It's very well conceived for you women, for every wench's hole will be filled; but what about the men? The women will run away from the ugly ones and chase the good-looking.

PRAXAGORA

The ugly will follow the handsomest into the public places after supper and see to it that the law, which forbids the women to sleep with the big, handsome men before having satisfied the ugly shrimps, is complied with.

BLEPYRUS

Thus ugly Lysicrates' nose will be as proud as the handsomest face?

PRAXAGORA

Yes, by Apollo! this is a truly popular decree, and what a set-back it will be for one of those elegants with their fingers loaded with rings, when a man with heavy shoes says to him, "Give way to me and wait till I have done; you will pass in after me."

BLEPYRUS

But if we live in this fashion, how will each one know his children?

PRAXAGORA

The youngest will look upon the oldest as their fathers.

BLEPYRUS

Ah! how heartily they will strangle all the old men, since even now, when each one knows his father, they make no bones about strangling him! then, my word! won't they just scorn and crap upon the old folks!

PRAXAGORA

But those around will prevent it. Hitherto, when anyone saw an old man beaten, he would not meddle, because it did not concern him; but now each will fear the sufferer may be his own father and such violence will be stopped.

BLEPYRUS

What you say is not so silly after all; but it would be highly unpleasant were Epicurus and Leucolophas to come up and call me father.

CHREMES

But it would be far worse, were . . .

BLEPYRUS

Were what?

CHREMES

. . . Aristyllus to embrace you and style you his father.

BLEPYRUS

He'll regret it if he does!

CHREMES

For you would smell vilely of mint if he kissed you. But he was born before the decree was carried, so that you have not to fear his kiss.

BLEPYRUS

It would be awful. But who will till the soil?

PRAXAGORA

The slaves. Your only cares will be to scent yourself, and to go and dine, when the shadow of the gnomon is ten feet long on the dial.

BLEPYRUS

But how shall we obtain clothing? Tell me that!

PRAXAGORA

You will first wear out those you have, and then we women will weave you others.

BLEPYRUS

Now another point: if the magistrates condemn a citizen to the payment of a fine, how is he going to do it? Out of the public funds? That would not be right surely.

PRAXAGORA

But there will be no more lawsuits.

BLEPYRUS

This rule will ruin you.

CHREMES

I think so too.

PRAXAGORA

Besides, my dear, why should there be lawsuits?

BLEPYRUS

Oh! for a thousand reasons, on my faith! Firstly, because a debtor denies his obligation.

PRAXAGORA

But where will the lender get the money to lend, if all is in common? unless he steals it out of the treasury? and he could not hide that!

CHREMES

Well thought out, by Demeter!

BLEPYRUS

But tell me this: here are some men who are returning from a feast and are drunk and they strike some passer-by; how are they going to pay the fine? Ah! you are puzzled now!

PRAXAGORA

They will have to take it out of their pittance; and being thus punished through their belly, they will not care to begin again.

BLEPYRUS

There will be no more thieves then, eh?

PRAXAGORA

Why steal, if you have a share of everything?

BLEPYRUS

People will not be robbed any more at night?

CHREMES

Not if you sleep at home.

PRAXAGORA

Even if you sleep outdoors there will be no more danger, for all will have the means of living. Besides, if anyone wanted to steal your cloak, you would give it to him yourself. Why not? You will only have to go to the common store and be given a better one.

BLEPYRUS

There will be no more playing at dice?

PRAXAGORA

What object will there be in playing?

BLEPYRUS

But what kind of life is it you propose to set up?

PRAXAGORA

The life in common. Athens will become nothing more than a single house, in which everything will belong to everyone; so that everybody will be able to go from one house to the other at pleasure.

BLEPYRUS

And where will the meals be served?

PRAXAGORA

The law-courts and the porticoes will be turned into dining-halls.

BLEPYRUS

And what will the speaker's platform be used for?

PRAXAGORA

I shall place the bowls and the ewers there; and young children will sing the glory of the brave from there, also the infamy of cowards, who out of very shame will no longer dare to come to the public meals.

BLEPYRUS

Well thought out, by Apollo! And what will you do with the urns?

PRAXAGORA

I shall have them taken to the market-place, and standing close to the statue of Harmodius, I shall draw a lot for each citizen, which by its letter will show the place where he must go to dine. Thus, those for whom I have

drawn an R will go to the royal portico; if it's a T, they will go to the portico of Theseus; if it's an F, to that of the flour-market.

BLEPYRUS

To cram himself there like a capon? [12]

PRAXAGORA

No, to dine there.

BLEPYRUS

And the citizen whom the lot has not given a letter showing where he is to dine will be driven off by everyone?

PRAXAGORA (*with great solemnity*)

But that will not occur. Each man will have plenty; he will not leave the feast until he is well drunk, and then with a chaplet on his head and a torch in his hand; and then the women running to meet you in the cross-roads will say, "This way, come to our house, you will find a beautiful young girl there."—"And I," another will call from her balcony, "have one so pretty and as white as milk; but before touching her, you must sleep with me." And the ugly men, watching closely after the handsome fellows, will say, "Hi! friend, where are you running to? Go in, but you must do nothing; it's the ugly and the flat-nosed to whom the law gives the right to make love first; amuse yourself on the porch while you wait, in handling your fig-leaves and playing with yourself." Well, tell me, does that picture suit you?

BLEPYRUS AND CHREMES

Marvellously well

PRAXAGORA

I must now go to the market-place to receive the property that is going to be placed in common and to choose a woman with a loud voice as my herald. I have all the cares of state on my shoulders, since the power has been entrusted to me. I must likewise go to busy myself about establishing the common meals, and you will attend your first banquet to-day.

BLEPYRUS

Are we going to banquet?

PRAXAGORA

Why, undoubtedly! Furthermore, I propose abolishing the whores.

BLEPYRUS

And what for?

PRAXAGORA

It's clear enough why; so that, instead of them, *we* may have the first-fruits of the young men. It is not meet that tricked-out slaves should rob free-born women of their pleasures. Let the courtesans be free to sleep with the slaves.

BLEPYRUS

I will march at your side, so that I may be seen and that everyone may say, "Look at the Dictator's husband!"

(*He follows* PRAXAGORA *into their house.*)

CHREMES

As for me, I shall arrange my belongings and take inventory of them, in order that I may take them to the market-place.

(*He departs.*)

(*There is an interlude of dancing by the* CHORUS, *after which* CHREMES *returns with his belongings and arranges them in a long line.*)

CHREMES

Come hither, my beautiful sieve, I have nothing more precious than you, come, all clotted with the flour of which I have poured so many sacks through you; you shall act the part of Canephorus in the procession of my chattels. Where is the sunshade carrier? Ah! this stew-pot shall take his place. Great gods, how black it is! it could not be more so if Lysicrates had boiled the drugs in it with which he dyes his hair. Hither, my beautiful mirror. And you, my tripod, bear this urn for me; you shall be the water-bearer; and you, cock, whose morning song has so often roused me in the middle of the night to send me hurrying to the Assembly, you shall be my flute-girl. Scaphephorus, do you take the large basin, place in it the honeycombs and twine the olive-branches over them, bring the tripods and the phial of perfume; as for the humble crowd of little pots, I will just leave them behind.

CITIZEN (*watching* CHREMES *from a distance*)

What folly to carry one's goods to the common store; I have a little more sense than that. No, no, by Posidon, I want first to ponder and calculate over the thing at leisure. I shall not be fool enough to strip myself of the fruits of my toil and thrift, if it is not for a very good reason; let us see first which way things turn. (*He walks over to* CHREMES) Hi! friend, what means this display of goods? Are you moving or are you going to pawn your stuff?

CHREMES

Neither.

CITIZEN

Why then are you setting all these things out in line? Is it a procession that you are starting off to Hiero, the public crier?

CHREMES

No, but in accordance with the new law that has been decreed, I am going to carry all these things to the market-place to make a gift of them to the state.

CITIZEN

Oh! bah! you don't mean that.

CHREMES

Certainly.

CITIZEN

Oh! Zeus the Deliverer! you unfortunate man!

CHREMES

Why?

CITIZEN

Why? It's as clear as noonday.

CHREMES

Must the laws not be obeyed then?

CITIZEN

What laws, you poor fellow?

CHREMES

Those that have been decreed.

CITIZEN

Decreed! Are you mad, I ask you?

CHREMES

Am I mad?

CITIZEN

Oh! this is the height of folly!

CHREMES

Because I obey the law?

CITIZEN

Is that the duty of a smart man?

CHREMES

Absolutely.

CITIZEN

Say rather of a ninny.

CHREMES

Don't you propose taking what belongs to you to the common stock?

CITIZEN

I'll take good care I don't until I see what the majority are doing.

CHREMES

There's but one opinion, namely, to contribute every single thing one has.

CITIZEN

I am waiting to see it, before I believe that.

CHREMES

At least, so they say in every street.

CITIZEN (*sardonically*)

And they will go on saying so.

CHREMES

Everyone talks of contributing all he has.

CITIZEN (*in the same tone*)

And will go on talking of it.

CHREMES

You weary me with your doubts and dubitations.

CITIZEN (*in the same tone*)

Everybody else will doubt it.

CHREMES

The pest seize you!

CITIZEN (*in the same tone*)

It *will* take you. (*Then seriously*) What? give up your goods! Is there a man of sense who will do such a thing? Giving is not one of our customs. Receiving is another matter; it's the way of the gods themselves. Look at the position of their hands on their statues; when we ask a favour, they present their hands turned palm up so as not to give, but to receive.

CHREMES

Wretch, let me do what is right. Come, I'll make a bundle of all these things. Where is my strap?

CITIZEN

Are you really going to carry them in?

CHREMES

Undoubtedly, and there are my two tripods strung together already.

CITIZEN

What folly! Not to wait to see what the others do, and then . . .

CHREMES

Well, and then what?

CITIZEN

. . . wait and put it off again.

CHREMES

What for?

CITIZEN

That an earthquake may come or an ill-omened flash of lightning, that a black cat may run across the street and no one carry in anything more, you fool!

CHREMES

It would be a fine thing if I were to find no room left for placing all this.

CITIZEN

You are much more likely to lose your stuff. As for placing it, you can be at ease, for there will be room enough as long as a month hence.

CHREMES

Why?

CITIZEN

I know these people; a decree is readily passed, but it is not so easily attended to.

CHREMES

All will contribute their property, my friend.

CITIZEN

But what if they don't?

CHREMES

But there is no doubt that they will.

CITIZEN (*insistently*)

But *anyhow*, what if they don't?

CHREMES

Do not worry; they will.

CITIZEN

And what if they oppose it?

CHREMES

We shall compel them to do so.

CITIZEN

And what if they prove the stronger?

CHREMES

I shall leave my goods and go off.

CITIZEN

And what if they sell them for you?

CHREMES

The plague take you!

CITIZEN

And if it does?

CHREMES

It will be a good riddance.

CITIZEN (*in an incredulous tone*)

You are really *bent* on contributing, then?

CHREMES

'Pon my soul, yes! Look, there are all my neighbours carrying in all they have.

CITIZEN (*sarcastically*)

Oh yes, it's Antisthenes; he's the type that *would* contribute! He would just as soon spend the next month sitting on the can.

CHREMES

The pest seize you!

CITIZEN

Will Callimachus, the chorus-master, contribute anything?

CHREMES

Why, more than Callias!

CITIZEN

The man must want to spend *all* his money!

CHREMES

How you weary me!

CITIZEN

Ah! I weary you? But, wretch, see what comes of decrees of this kind. Don't you remember the one reducing the price of salt?

CHREMES

Why, certainly I do.

CITIZEN

And do you remember that about the copper coinage?

CHREMES

Ah! that cursed money did me enough harm. I had sold my grapes and had my mouth stuffed with pieces of copper; indeed I was going to the market to buy flour, and was in the act of holding out my bag wide open, when the herald started shouting, "Let none in future accept pieces of copper; those of silver are alone current."

CITIZEN

And quite lately, were we not all swearing that the impost of one-fortieth, which Euripides had conceived, would bring five hundred talents to the state, and everyone was vaunting Euripides to the skies? But when the thing was looked at closely, it was seen that this fine decree was mere moonshine and would produce nothing, and you would have willingly burnt this very same Euripides alive.

CHREMES

The cases are quite different, my good fellow. We were the rulers then, but now it's the women.

CITIZEN

Whom, by Posidon, I will never allow to piss on my nose.

CHREMES

I don't know what the devil you're chattering about. Slave, pick up that bundle.

HERALD (*a woman*)

Let all citizens come, let them hasten at our leader's bidding! It is the new law. The lot will teach each citizen where he is to dine; the tables are already laid and loaded with the most exquisite dishes; the couches are covered with the softest of cushions; the wine and water are already being mixed in the ewers; the slaves are standing in a row and waiting to pour scent over the guests; the fish is being grilled, the hares are on the spit and the cakes are being kneaded, chaplets are being plaited and the fritters are frying; the youngest women are watching the pea-soup in the saucepans, and in the midst of them all stands Smoeus, dressed as a knight, washing the crockery. And Geron has come, dressed in a grand tunic and finely shod; he is joking with another young fellow and has already divested himself of his heavy shoes and his cloak. The pantry man is waiting, so come and use your jaws.

(*Exit*)

CITIZEN

All right, I'll go. Why should I delay, since the state commands me?

CHREMES

And where are you going to, since you have not deposited your belongings?

CITIZEN

To the feast.

CHREMES

If the women have any wits, they will first insist on your depositing your goods.

CITIZEN

But I am going to deposit them.

CHREMES

When?

CITIZEN

I am not the man to make delays.

CHREMES

How do you mean?

CITIZEN

There will be many less eager than I.

CHREMES

In the meantime you are going to dine.

CITIZEN

What else should I do? Every sensible man must give his help to the state.

CHREMES

But if admission is forbidden you?

CITIZEN

I shall duck my head and slip in.

CHREMES

And if the women have you beaten?

CITIZEN

I shall summon them.

CHREMES

And if they laugh in your face?

CITIZEN

I shall stand near the door . . .

CHREMES

And then?

CITIZEN

. . . and seize upon the dishes as they pass.

CHREMES

Then go there, but after me. Sicon and Parmeno, pick up all this baggage.

CITIZEN

Come, I will help you carry it

CHREMES (*pushing him away*)

No, no, I should be afraid of your pretending to the leader that what I am depositing belonged to you.

(*Exit with his belongings.*)

CITIZEN

Let me see! let me think of some good trick by which I can keep my goods and yet take my share of the common feast. (*He reflects for a moment.*) Ha! that's a fine idea! Quick! I'll go and dine, ha! ha!

(*Exit laughing*)

(*Interlude of dancing by the* CHORUS.)

(*The scene shifts to a different section of Athens and the two houses are now to be thought of as those of two prostitutes.*)

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*leaning out of the window of one house*)

How is this? no men are coming? And yet it must be fully time! Then it is for naught that I have painted myself with white lead, dressed myself in my beautiful yellow robe, and that I am here, frolicking and humming between my teeth to attract some passer-by! Oh, Muses, alight upon my lips, inspire me with some soft Ionian love-song!

YOUNG GIRL (*in the window of the other house*)

You putrid old thing, you have placed yourself at the window before me. You were expecting to strip my vines during my absence and to trap some man in your snares with your songs. If you sing, I shall follow suit; all this singing will weary the spectators, but is nevertheless very pleasant and very diverting.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*thumbing her nose at the* YOUNG GIRL)

Ha! here is an old man; take him and lead him away. (*To the flute-player*) As for you, you young flute-player, let us hear some airs that are worthy of you and me.

(*She sings*)

Let him who wishes to taste pleasure come to my side. These young things know nothing about it; it's only the women of ripe age who understand the art of love, and no one could know how to fondle the lover who possessed me so well as myself, the young girls are all flightiness.

YOUNG GIRL (*singing in her turn*)

Don't be jealous of the young girls; voluptuousness resides in the pure outline of their beautiful limbs and blossoms on their rounded breasts; but you, old woman, you who are tricked out and perfumed as if for your own funeral, are an object of love only for grim Death himself.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*singing again*)

May your tongue be stopped; may you be unable to find your couch when you want to be loved. And on your couch, when your lips seek a lover, may you embrace only a viper!

YOUNG GIRL (*singing again*)

Alas! alas! what is to become of me? There is no lover! I am left here alone; my mother has gone out. (*Interrupting her song*) There's no need to mention the rest. (*Then singing again*) Oh! my dear nurse, I adjure you to call Orthagoras, and may heaven bless you. Ah! poor child, desire is consuming you like an Ionian woman; (*interrupting again*) and yet you are no stranger to the wanton arts of the Lesbian women. (*Resuming her song*) But you shall not rob me

of my pleasures; you will not be able to reduce or filch the time that first belongs to me.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Sing as much as you please, peep out like a cat lying in wait, but none shall pass through your door without first having been to see me.

YOUNG GIRL

If anyone enter your house, it will be to carry out your corpse. And that will be something new for you, you rotten old thing!

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Can anything be new to an old woman? My old age will not harm you.

YOUNG GIRL

Ah! shame on your painted cheeks!

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Why do you speak to me at all?

YOUNG GIRL

And why do you place yourself at the window?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

I am singing to myself about my lover, Epigenes.

YOUNG GIRL

Can you have any other lover than that old fop Geres?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Epigenes will show you that himself, for he is coming to me. See, here he is.

YOUNG GIRL

He's not thinking of you in the least.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Aye, but he is.

YOUNG GIRL

Old starveling! Let's see what he will do. I will leave my window.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

And I likewise You will see I am much wiser than you.

A YOUNG MAN (*sings*)

Ah! could I but sleep with the young girl without first making love to the old flat-nose! It is intolerable for a free-born man

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*singing to the same tune*)

Willy nilly, you must first gratify my desire. There shall be no nonsense about that, for my authority is the law and the law must be obeyed in a democracy.

(*Speaking*) But come, let me hide, to see what he's going to do. (*She retires.*)

YOUNG MAN

Ah! ye gods, if I were to find the sweet child alone! the wine has fired my lust.

YOUNG GIRL (*reappearing in her window*)

I have tricked that cursed old wretch; she has left her window, thinking I would stay at home. Ah! here is the lover we were talking of.

(*She sings*)

This way, my love, this way, come here and haste to rest the whole night in my arms. I worship your lovely curly hair; I am consumed with ardent desire. Oh! Eros, in thy mercy, compel him to my bed.

YOUNG MAN (*standing beneath the* YOUNG GIRL'S *window and singing*)

Come down and haste to open the door unless you want to see me fall dead with desire. Dearest treasure, I am burning to yield myself to voluptuous sport, lying on your bosom, to let my hands play with your bottom. Aphrodité, why dost thou fire me with such delight in her? Oh! Eros, I beseech thee, have mercy and make her share my couch. Words cannot express the tortures I am suffering. Oh! my adored one, I adjure you, open your door for me and press me to your heart; 'tis for you that I am suffering. Oh! my jewel, my idol, you child of Aphrodité, the confidante of the Muses, the sister of the Graces, you living picture of voluptuousness, oh! open for me, press me to your heart, 'tis for you that I am suffering.

(*He knocks.*)

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*reappearing suddenly*)

What are you knocking for? Are you looking for me?

YOUNG MAN

What an idea!

FIRST OLD WOMAN

But you were tapping at the door.

YOUNG MAN

Death would be sweeter.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Why do you come with that torch in your hand?

YOUNG MAN

I am looking for a man from Anaphlystia.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

What's his name?

YOUNG MAN

Oh! it's not Sebinus, whom no doubt you are expecting.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*taking him by the arm*)

By Aphrodité, you *must*, whether you like it or not.

YOUNG MAN (*shaking her off*)

We are not now concerned with cases dated sixty years back; they are remanded for a later day; we are dealing only with those of less than twenty.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

That was under the old order of things, sweetheart, but now you must first busy yourself with us.

YOUNG MAN

Aye, *if I want to*, according to the rules of draughts, where we may either take or leave.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

But it's not according to the rules of draughts that you take your seat at the banquet.

YOUNG MAN

I don't know what you mean; it's at *this* door I want to knock.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*standing in his way*)

Not before knocking at mine first.

YOUNG MAN (*haughtily*)

For the moment I really have no need for old leather.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

I know that you love me; perhaps you are surprised to find me at the door. But come, let me kiss you.

YOUNG MAN (*pulling back; sarcastically*)

No, no, my dear, I am afraid of your lover.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Of whom?

YOUNG MAN

The most gifted of painters.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

And who is he?

YOUNG MAN

The artist who paints the little bottles on coffins. But get you indoors, lest he should find you at the door.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

I know what you want.

YOUNG MAN

I can say as much of you.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (*hanging on to him*)

By Aphrodité, who has granted me this good chance, I won't let you go.

YOUNG MAN

You are drivelling, you little old hag.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Rubbish! I am going to lead you to my couch.

YOUNG MAN

What need for buying hooks? I will let her down to the bottom of the well and pull up the buckets with her old carcase, for she's crooked enough for that.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

A truce to your jeering, poor boy, and follow me.

YOUNG MAN

Nothing compels me to do so, unless you have paid the levy of five hundredths for me.[13]

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Look, by Aphrodité, there is nothing that delights me as much as sleeping with a lad of your years.

YOUNG MAN

And I abhor such as you, and I will never, never consent.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

But, by Zeus, here is something will force you to it.

(*She shows him a document.*)

YOUNG MAN

What's that?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

A decree, which orders you to enter my house.

YOUNG MAN

Read it out then, and let's hear.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Listen. "The women have decreed that if a young man desires a young girl, he can only lay her after having satisfied an old woman, and if he refuses and goes to seek the maiden, the old women are authorized to seize him and drag him in."

YOUNG MAN

Alas! I shall become a Procrustes.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Obey the law.

YOUNG MAN

But if a fellow-citizen, a friend, came to pay my ransom?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

No man may dispose of anything above a medimnus.

YOUNG MAN

But may I not enter an excuse?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

There's no evasion.

YOUNG MAN

I shall declare myself a merchant and so escape service.

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Beware what you do!

YOUNG MAN

Well! what is to be done?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Follow me

YOUNG MAN

Is it absolutely necessary?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Yes, as surely as if Diomedes had commanded it.

YOUNG MAN

Well then, first spread out a layer of origanum upon four pieces of wood; bind fillets round your head, bring phials of scent and place a bowl filled with lustral water before your door.[14]

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Will you buy a chaplet for me too?

YOUNG MAN

Yes, if you outlast the tapers; for I expect to see you fall down dead as you go in.

YOUNG GIRL (*running out of her house*)

Where are you dragging this unfortunate man to?

FIRST OLD WOMAN

To my own bed.

YOUNG GIRL

That's not right. A young fellow like him is not of the age to suit you. You ought to be his mother rather than his wife. With these laws in force, the earth will be filled with Oedipuses.

(*She takes him away with her.*)

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Oh! you cursed pest! it's envy that makes you say this, but I will be revenged.

(*She goes back into her house.*)

YOUNG MAN

By Zeus the Deliverer, what a service you have done me, by freeing me of this old wretch! with what ardour I will show you my gratitude in a substantial form!

(*Just as he begins to go in with the* YOUNG GIRL *an even older and uglier woman enters.*)

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Hi! you there! where are you taking that young man to, in defiance of the law? The decree ordains that he must first sleep with me.

YOUNG MAN

Oh! what a misfortune! Where does *this* hag come from? She's a more frightful monster than the other even.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Come here.

(*She takes him by the arm.*)

YOUNG MAN (*to the* YOUNG GIRL)

Oh! I beg you, don't let me be led off by her!

SECOND OLD WOMAN

It's not I but the law that leads you off.

YOUNG MAN

No, it's not the law, but an Empusa with a body covered with blemishes and blotches.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Follow me, my handsome little friend, come along quickly without any more ado.

YOUNG MAN

Oh! let me go to the can first, so that I may gather my wits somewhat. Else I should be so terrified that you would see me letting out something yellow.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Never mind! you can crap, if you want, in my house.

YOUNG MAN

More than I want to, I'm afraid; but I offer you two good securities

SECOND OLD WOMAN

I don't require them

(*A* THIRD OLD WOMAN, *the ugliest yet, now appears*)

THIRD OLD WOMAN

Hi! friend, where are you off to with that woman?

YOUNG MAN

I am not going with her, but am being dragged by force. Oh! whoever you are, may heaven bless you for having had pity on me in my dire misfortune. (*Turns round and sees the* THIRD OLD WOMAN.) Oh Heracles! oh Pan! oh Corybantes! oh Dioscuri! Why, she is still more awful! Oh! what a monster! great gods! Are you an ape plastered with white lead, or the ghost of some old hag returned from the dark borderlands of death?

THIRD OLD WOMAN (*taking his other arm*)
No jesting! Follow me.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
No, come this way.

THIRD OLD WOMAN
I will never let you go.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Nor will I.

YOUNG MAN
But you will rend me asunder, you cursed wretches.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
I'm the one he must go with according to the law.

THIRD OLD WOMAN
Not if an uglier old woman than yourself appears.

YOUNG MAN
But if you kill me at the outset, how shall I afterwards go to find this beautiful girl of mine?

THIRD OLD WOMAN
That's your problem. But begin by obeying.

YOUNG MAN
Of which one must I rid myself first?

THIRD OLD WOMAN
Don't you know? Come here.

YOUNG MAN
Then let the other one release me.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Come to *my* house.

YOUNG MAN
If this dame will let me go.

THIRD OLD WOMAN
No, by all the gods, I'll not let you go.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Nor will I.

YOUNG MAN

You would make very bad boatwomen.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

Why?

YOUNG MAN

Because you would tear your passengers to pieces in dragging them on board.

THIRD OLD WOMAN

Then come along, do, and hold your tongue.

SECOND OLD WOMAN

No, by Zeus, come with me.

YOUNG MAN

It's clearly a case for the decree of Cannonus; I must cut myself in two in order to lay you both. But how am I to work two oars at once?

THIRD OLD WOMAN

Easily enough, you have only to eat a full pot of onions.[15]

YOUNG MAN

Oh! great gods! here I am close to the door and being dragged in!

SECOND OLD WOMAN (*to* THIRD OLD WOMAN)

You will gain nothing by this, for I shall rush into your house with you.

YOUNG MAN

Oh, no! no! better to suffer a single misfortune than two.

THIRD OLD WOMAN

Ah! by Hecaté, whether you wish it or not . . .

YOUNG MAN

What a fate is mine, that I must make love to such a stinking harridan the whole night through and all day; then, when I am rid of her, I have still to tackle a brick-coloured hag! Am I not truly unfortunate? Ah! by Zeus the Deliverer; under what fatal star must I have been born, that I must sail in company with such monsters! But if my bark sinks in the sewer of these strumpets, may I be buried at the very threshold of the door; let this hag be stood upright on my grave, let her be coated alive with pitch and her legs covered with molten lead up to the ankles, and let her be set alight as a funeral lamp.

(*The* YOUNG MAN *is dragged off by the two* OLD WOMEN, *one on each arm.*)

(*Interlude of dancing by the* CHORUS.)

A Servant-Maid to Praxagora (*she comes from the banquet*)

What happiness is the people's! what joy is mine, and above all that of my mistress! Happy are ye, who form choruses before our house! Happy are ye, both neighbours and fellow-citizens! Happy am I myself! I am but a servant, and yet I have poured on my hair the most exquisite essences. Let thanks be rendered to thee, Oh, Zeus! But a still more delicious aroma is that of the wine of Thasos; its sweet bouquet delights the drinker for a long time, whereas the others lose their bloom and vanish quickly. Therefore, long life to the wine-jars of Thasos! Pour yourselves out unmixed wine, it will cheer you the whole night through, if you choose the liquor that possesses most fragrance. (*To the* Chorus) But tell me, friends, where is my mistress's husband?

Leader of the Chorus

Wait for him here; he will no doubt pass this way.

Maid-Servant

Ah! there he is just going to dinner. Oh! master! what joy! what blessedness is yours!

Blepyrus

Mine?

Maid-Servant

None can compare his happiness to yours; you have reached its utmost height, you who, alone out of thirty thousand citizens have not yet dined.

Leader of the Chorus

Aye, here is undoubtedly a truly happy man.

Maid-Servant

Where are you off to?

Blepyrus

I am going to dine.

Maid-Servant

By Aphrodité, you will be the last of all, far and away the last. Yet my mistress has bidden me take you and take with you these young girls. Some Chian wine is left and lots of other good things. Therefore hurry, and invite likewise all the spectators whom we have pleased, and such of the judges as are not against us, to follow us; we will offer them everything they can desire.

BLEPYRUS

Generously invite everyone and omit no one, old or young. Dinner is ready for all; they need only go home. As for me, I shall go to the banquet with the customary torch in my hand.

MAID-SERVANT

But why do you tarry, Blepyrus? Take these young girls with you and, while you are away a while, I will whet my appetite with some dining-song.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I have but a few words to say. let the wise judge me because of whatever is wise in this piece, and those who like a laugh by whatever has made them laugh. In this way I address pretty well everyone. If the lot has assigned my comedy to be played first of all, don't let that be a disadvantage to me; engrave in your memory all that shall have pleased you in it and judge the competitors equitably as you have bound yourselves by oath to do. Don't act like vile courtesans, who never remember any but their last lover.

MAID-SERVANT

It is time, friends, high time to go to the banquet, if we want to have our share of it. Open your ranks and let the Cretan rhythms regulate your dances.

BLEPYRUS

That's what I am doing.

MAID-SERVANT

And you others, let your light steps too keep time. Very soon we'll be eating *lépadotémachosélachogáleokránioleípsanodrímypotrímmatosílphiotýromélitokátakechýmenokichlepikóssyphophátttoperísteraléktryonóptokepháliokínklopeleíolagoíosiraíobaphétragalópterygón.*[16] Come, quickly, seize hold of a plate, snatch up a cup, and let's run to secure a place at table. The rest will have their jaws at work by this time.

CHORUS (*as they depart, dancing, with* BLEPYRUS *leading them*)

Dance gaily! *Iai! Iai!* We shall dine! *Euoi! Euai! Euai!* As for a triumph! *Euoi! Euoi! Euai! Euai!*

1. The operation of carding would expose the arms, and their soft and telltale contours would disastrously evince the sex of the carder.

2. It is not easy to see why Praxagora here substitutes the cat for the usual young pig. Rogers seems on the right track when he says that the word for the young pig, *choiridion*, meaning also "young female genitalia," was avoided by Praxagora in an "assembly of ladies," but the implication that this was motivated by considerations of delicacy is misguided and Victorian. The real point is, perhaps, that this word would have provoked a number of irrelevant and feminine remarks, and the revolutionary leader has for some time been energetically striving to bring her followers down to the serious business that lies before them.

3. This is the usual gibe at the bibulousness of the Athenian women.

4. An oath used by women only.

5. A reference to the alliance with Thebes that Athens had concluded in 395. It was quickly joined by other states and for a while there were high hopes, but like most such developments in fourth-century history, it came to little.

6. A reference to the Spartan invasions of Attica in the early years of the Peloponnesian War; the inhabitants of the rural districts sought refuge in the city, where they were very inadequately housed.

7. There is a pun here on the two senses of *hypokrouein*, "to interrupt" and "to make love to."

8. Blepyrus personifies his intestinal urges under the name *Koprelos*, which is formed, in the usual manner of personal names, from *kopros*, "excrement."

9. The Greek is *Achradousios*, formed from *achras*, "wild pear" and at the same time suggesting the deme Acherdus.

10. These were signs of lateness; see note 2 on *The Acharnians*.

11. Praxagora's remark is merely an idiomatic phrase of abuse; Blepyrus understands, or affects to understand, it literally.

12. There is a pun here on the two Greek words *kaptein*, "to stuff" and *kappa*, the name of the letter *K*.

13. We do not know what the tax here referred to was, and the point

of the Young Man's remark is thus obscure; only one thing is clear, and this is that the rights of citizenship are involved. It may be that the Young Man may not rate as a slave unless a tax has been paid on his assessed value, but it is equally possible that the Old Woman may not derive the benefits of the new law until she has paid a capital levy of some sort.

14. These are the customary formalities connected with the laying-out of the dead.

15. The Greek word here translated as "onions" is *bolboi;* we do not know just what plant it signifies, but the ancient commentators know of its aphrodisiac effects, and these are sufficient to explain its use here.

16. This magnificent word, the longest that has ever been constructed in an Indo-Germanic language, is here merely transliterated from the Greek, and the accents indicate how it should be read. The precise signification of some of the components is not entirely certain, but so far as we can tell the ingredients of the dish are: limpets, slices of salt fish, thornbacks, whistle-fishes, cornel-berries, a remoulade of leftover brains seasoned with silphium and cheese, thrushes basted with honey, blackbirds, ringdoves, squabs, chickens, fried mullets, wagtails, rock-pigeons, hare, and wings ground up in new wine that has been boiled down.

XI

PLUTUS

Characters in the Play

Chremylus
Cario, *Servant of Chremylus*
Plutus, *God of Riches*
Blepsidemus, *friend of Chremylus*
Poverty
Wife of Chremylus
A Just Man
An Informer
An Old Woman
A Youth
Hermes
A Priest of Zeus
Chorus of Rustics

INTRODUCTION

PRODUCED in 388, four years after *The Ecclesiazusae*, *Plutus* is the latest comedy of Aristophanes which we possess, although we know that he wrote at least two more, which were produced in the name of his son Ararus. We have no information regarding the festival at which the play was brought out, nor are we told what prize it won. It is the least amusing of the extant comedies, and its chief interest for the modern reader lies in the fact that it is the nearest thing to a representative of the Middle Comedy that has come down to us. The later centuries of the ancient world and the schoolmasters of the Byzantine Empire, however, were inordinately fond of it, the former because of what they regarded as its refinement, the latter because it only infrequently offended their moral tastes.

The subject of the play is the Utopian situation produced by the restoration to Plutus, the God of Wealth, of the sight of his eyes. Chremylus, the human hero of the play, has consulted the oracle of Apollo on the question of how his son may succeed in life without becoming a scoundrel, and the god has directed him to follow the first man he meets on leaving the temple. The object of the divine reference has turned out to be a dirty and disreputable blind man, and Chremylus has been dutifully dogging his heels ever since he first laid eyes on him. By the time the play begins Cario, the slave of Chremylus and a character much more of the New than of the Old Comedy, has quite lost patience with his master's latest foolishness and demands in no uncertain terms to know the reasons and the purposes of it. Chremylus explains, but Cario is far from convinced and insists on finding out who the blind man is. Plutus discloses his identity with the greatest reluctance, for ever since the malignity of Zeus had deprived him of his vision, he has experienced nothing but the worst of treatment at the hands of mankind every time he has revealed his name. At this point Chremylus is suddenly inspired with the magnificent idea that if the blindness of Plutus is healed, all the ills of human life will be rectified, and we remember *The Birds* and the birth of Pithetaerus' projects.

Plutus is sceptical at first, but Chremylus convinces him without too

much difficulty, and after dispatching his slave to fetch the husbandmen who are his boon companions, he takes the god into his house. The entrance of the Chorus has thus been motivated, and soon Cario comes in at the head of the rustic band, which plays a very unimportant rôle in the comedy. Chremylus comes out and greets his country neighbours, but their mutual felicitations are interrupted by the arrival of Blepsidemus, a friend of Chremylus, who finds much that is suspicious in the sudden affluence of the household. Once it has been made quite clear to him that he too stands to profit by the situation, his hostile attitude loses its principal or solitary *raison d'être* and he enthusiastically supports the proposals of Chremylus. At this point both friends are frightened out of their wits by the entrance of a woman of superhuman stature and terrifying aspect, looking for all the world like some Fury detached from a tragic chorus. She turns out to be Poverty, and Chremylus engages her in a long debate on the question of whether it is she or Plutus who most benefits mankind; the scene is the descendant and the souvenir of the Agon in the Old Comedy. Beaten in the argument, Poverty leaves the stage with laments and threats, but Chremylus laughs at these and summons Cario, with whom he takes Plutus to the temple of Asclepius to be healed of his blindness.

The stage is now left to the Chorus, and if we have not read *The Ecclesiazusae* we expect the delivery of the parabasis; all that we have is the indication that there was an interlude of dancing by the Chorus. We must, however, assume the lapse of a considerable amount of time during this, for the scene which follows consists mainly of Cario's amusing report of the miraculous cure that has been performed on Plutus, and in a little while the god himself returns, rejoicing in the light that he can see again and in the Utopia which he is about to materialize. The scenes which follow the return of Plutus are more reminiscent of the Old Comedy than anything else in the play, for they represent the familiar series of anonymous and typical characters who illustrate the various social effects of the revolution which has been effected in the first part of the comedy. Thus the poet brings in first the happy Just Man, for whom the world has only now become tolerable, and after him the Informer, who fails to arouse the pity which seems his only means of livelihood at present, the Old Woman, whose gigolo will now have no reason to consort with her, Hermes, who is unable to find any use for his rascally talents in the Utopian society that a seeing Plutus has established, and finally a priest of Zeus, whom the hunger induced by a sacrificeless profession has driven to transfer his services to the new lord of the universe. The comedy ends rather lamely with the assurance of Chremylus to the old woman that her young man will be with her this evening and the beginning of a sacred procession to install Plutus on the Acropolis.

If we make *Plutus* the first, rather than the last, comedy of Aristophanes that we read, we find it a sufficiently amusing play, but if we come to it fresh from *Peace* or *The Thesmophoriazusae* it is a singularly disappointing performance. One may suspect, however, that if we knew the history of Athens as intimately from 410 to 388 as we know it from 431 to 411 we should be astonished at the resistance to change exhibited by the Old Comedy. The thirty-seven years between *The Acharnians* and *Plutus* brought with them an amount of alteration of the form and the spirit of comedy that is impressive and depressing enough, but the changes in the social and economic life of Athens during this period were incomparably greater.

PLUTUS

(SCENE.—*The Orchestra represents a public square in Athens. In the background is the house of* CHREMYLUS. *A ragged old blind man enters, followed by* CHREMYLUS *and his slave* CARIO.)

CARIO

WHAT an unhappy fate, great gods, to be the slave of a fool! A servant may give the best of advice, but if his master does not follow it, the poor slave must inevitably have his share in the disaster; for fortune does not allow him to dispose of his own body, it belongs to his master who has bought it. Alas! 'tis the way of the world. But the god, Apollo (*in tragic style*), whose oracles the Pythian priestess on her golden tripod makes known to us, deserves my censure, for surely he is a physician and a cunning diviner; and yet my master is leaving his temple infected with mere madness and insists on following a blind man. Is this not opposed to all good sense? It is for us, who see clearly, to guide those who don't; whereas he clings to the trail of a blind fellow and compels me to do the same without answering my questions with ever a word. (*To* CHREMYLUS) Aye, master, unless you tell me why we are following this unknown fellow, I will not be silent, but I will worry and torment you, for you cannot beat me because of my sacred chaplet of laurel.

CHREMYLUS

No, but if you worry me I will take off your chaplets, and then you will only get a sounder thrashing.

CARIO

That's an old song! I am going to leave you no peace till you have told me who this man is; and if I ask it, it's entirely because of my interest in you.

CHREMYLUS

Well, be it so. I will reveal it to you as being the most faithful and the most rascally of all my servants. I honoured the gods and did what was right, and yet I was none the less poor and unfortunate.

CARIO

I know it but too well.

CHREMYLUS

Others amassed wealth—the sacrilegious, the demagogues, the informers, indeed every sort of rascal.

CARIO

I believe you.

CHREMYLUS

Therefore I came to consult the oracle of the god, not on my own account, for my unfortunate life is nearing its end, but for my only son; I wanted to ask Apollo if it was necessary for him to become a thorough knave and renounce his virtuous principles, since that seemed to me to be the only way to succeed in life.

CARIO (*with ironic gravity*)

And with what responding tones did the sacred tripod resound?

CHREMYLUS

You shall know. The god ordered me in plain terms to follow the first man I should meet upon leaving the temple and to persuade him to accompany me home.

CARIO

And who was the first one you met?

CHREMYLUS

This blind man.

CARIO

And you are stupid enough not to understand the meaning of such an answer? Why, the god was advising you thereby, and that in the clearest possible way, to bring up your son according to the fashion of your country.

CHREMYLUS

What makes you think that?

CARIO

Is it not evident to the blind, that nowadays to do nothing that is right is the best way to get on?

CHREMYLUS

No, that is not the meaning of the oracle; there must be another that is nobler. If this blind man would tell us who he is and why and with what

object he has led us here, we should no doubt understand what our oracle really does mean.

CARIO (*to* PLUTUS)

Come, tell us at once who you are, or I shall give effect to my threat. (*He menaces him.*) And quick too, be quick, I say.

PLUTUS

I'll thrash you.

CARIO (*to* CHREMYLUS)

Do you understand who he says he is?

CHREMYLUS

It's to you and not to me that he replies thus: your mode of questioning him was ill-advised. (*To* PLUTUS) Come, friend, if you care to oblige an honest man, answer me.

PLUTUS

I'll knock you down.

CARIO (*sarcastically*)

Ah! what a pleasant fellow and what a delightful prophecy the god has given you!

CHREMYLUS (*to* PLUTUS)

By Demeter, you'll have no reason to laugh presently.

CARIO

If you don't speak, you wretch, I will surely do you an ill turn.

PLUTUS

Friends, take yourselves off and leave me.

CHREMYLUS

That we very certainly shan't.

CARIO

This, master, is the best thing to do. I'll undertake to secure him the most frightful death; I will lead him to the verge of a precipice and then leave him there, so that he'll break his neck when he pitches over.

CHREMYLUS

Well then, seize him right away.

(CARIO *does so.*)

PLUTUS

Oh, no! Have mercy!

CHREMYLUS

Will thou speak then?

PLUTUS

But if you learn who I am, I know well that you will ill-use me and will not let me go again.

CHREMYLUS

I call the gods to witness that you have naught to fear if you will only speak.

PLUTUS

Well then, first unhand me.

CHREMYLUS

There! we set you free.

PLUTUS

Listen then, since I must reveal what I had intended to keep a secret. I am Plutus.

CARIO

Oh! you wretched rascal! You Plutus all the while, and you never said so!

CHREMYLUS

You, Plutus, and in this piteous guise! Oh, Phoebus Apollo! oh, ye gods of heaven and hell! Oh, Zeus! is it really and truly as you say?

PLUTUS

Yes.

CHREMYLUS

Plutus' very own self?

PLUTUS

His own very self and none other.

CHREMYLUS

But tell me, how come you're so squalid?

PLUTUS

I have just left Patrocles' house, who has not had a bath since his birth.

CHREMYLUS

But your infirmity; how did that happen? Tell me.

PLUTUS

Zeus inflicted it on me, because of his jealousy of mankind. When I was young, I threatened him that I would only go to the just, the wise, the men of ordered life; to prevent my distinguishing these, he struck me with blindness! so much does he envy the good!

CHREMYLUS

And yet, it's only the upright and just who honour him.

PLUTUS

Quite true.

CHREMYLUS

Therefore, if ever you recovered your sight, you would shun the wicked?

PLUTUS

Undoubtedly.

CHREMYLUS

You would visit the good?

PLUTUS

Assuredly. It is a very long time since I saw them.

CARIO (*to the audience*)

That's not astonishing. I, who see clearly, don't see a single one.

PLUTUS

Now let me leave you, for I have told you everything.

CHREMYLUS

No, certainly not! we shall fasten ourselves on to you faster than ever.

PLUTUS

Did I not tell you, you were going to plague me?

CHREMYLUS

Oh! I adjure you, believe what I say and don't leave me; for you will seek in vain for a more honest man than myself.

CARIO

There is only one man more worthy; and that is I.

PLUTUS

All talk like this, but as soon as they secure my favours and grow rich, their wickedness knows no bounds.

CHREMYLUS

And yet all men are not wicked.

PLUTUS

All. There's no exception.

CARIO

You shall pay for that opinion.

CHREMYLUS

Listen to what happiness there is in store for you, if you but stay with us. I have hope; aye, I have good hope with the god's help to deliver you from that blindness, in fact to restore your sight.

PLUTUS

Oh! do nothing of the kind, for I don't wish to recover it.

CHREMYLUS

What's that you say?

CARIO

This fellow hugs his own misery.

PLUTUS

If you were mad enough to cure me, and Zeus heard of it, he would overwhelm me with his anger.

CHREMYLUS

And is he not doing this now by leaving you to grope your wandering way?

PLUTUS

I don't know; but I'm horribly afraid of him.

CHREMYLUS

Indeed? Ah! you are the biggest poltroon of all the gods! Why, Zeus with his throne and his lightnings would not be worth an obolus if you recovered your sight, were it but for a few moments.

PLUTUS

Impious man, don't talk like that.

CHREMYLUS

Fear nothing! I will prove to you that you are far more powerful and mightier than he.

PLUTUS

I mightier than he?

CHREMYLUS

Aye, by heaven! (*To* CARIO) For instance, what is the basis of the power that Zeus wields over the other gods?

CARIO

Money; he has so much of it.

CHREMYLUS

And who gives it to him?

CARIO (*pointing to Plutus*)

This fellow.

CHREMYLUS

If sacrifices are offered to him, is not Plutus their cause?

CARIO

Undoubtedly, for it's wealth that all demand and clamour most loudly for.

CHREMYLUS

Thus it's Plutus who is the fount of all the honours rendered to Zeus, whose worship he can wither up at the root, if it so pleases him.

PLUTUS

And how so?

CHREMYLUS

Not an ox, nor a cake, nor indeed anything at all could be offered, if you did not wish it.

PLUTUS

Why?

CHREMYLUS

Why? but what means are there to buy anything if you are not there to give the money? Hence if Zeus should cause you any trouble, you will destroy his power without other help.

PLUTUS

So it's because of me that sacrifices are offered to him?

CHREMYLUS

Most assuredly. Whatever is dazzling, beautiful or charming in the eyes of mankind, comes from you. Does not everything depend on wealth?

CARIO

I myself was bought for a few coins; if I'm a slave, it's only because I was not rich.

CHREMYLUS

And what of the Corinthian whores? If a poor man offers them proposals, they do not listen; but if it be a rich one, instantly they turn their arses to him.

CARIO

It's the same with the lads; they care not for love, to them money means everything.

CHREMYLUS

You speak of male whores; yet some of them are honest, and it's not money they ask of their patrons.

CARIO

What then?

CHREMYLUS

A fine horse, a pack of hounds.

CARIO

Yes, they would blush to ask for money and cleverly disguise their shame.

CHREMYLUS

It is in you that every art, all human inventions, have had their origin; it is through you that one man sits cutting leather in his shop.

CARIO

That another fashions iron or wood.

CHREMYLUS

That yet another chases the gold he has received from you.

CARIO

That one is a fuller.

CHREMYLUS

That the other washes wool.

CARIO

That this one is a tanner.

CHREMYLUS

And that other sells onions.

CARIO

And if the adulterer, caught red-handed, is depilated, it's on account of you.

PLUTUS

Oh! great gods! I knew naught of all this!

CARIO (*to* CHREMYLUS)

Is it not he who lends the Great King all his pride? Is it not he who draws the citizens to the Assembly?

CHREMYLUS

And tell me, is it not you who equip the triremes?

CARIO

And who feed our mercenaries at Corinth? Are not you the cause of Pamphilus' sufferings?

CHREMYLUS

And of the needle-seller's with Pamphilus?

CARIO

It is not because of you that Agyrrhius farts so loudly?

CHREMYLUS

And that Philepsius rolls off his fables? That troops are sent to succour the Egyptians? And that Lais is kept by Philonides?

CARIO

That the tower of Timotheus . . .

CHREMYLUS

. . . (*To* CARIO) May it fall upon your head! (*To* PLUTUS) In short, Plutus, it is through you that everything is done; you must realize that you are the sole cause both of good and evil.

CARIO

In war, it's the flag under which you serve that victory favours.

PLUTUS

What! I can do so many things by myself and unaided?

CHREMYLUS

And many others besides; wherefore men are never tired of your gifts. They get weary of all else,—of love . . .

CARIO

Bread.

CHREMYLUS

Music.

CARIO

Sweetmeats.

CHREMYLUS

Honours.

CARIO

Cakes.

CHREMYLUS

Battles.

CARIO

Figs.

CHREMYLUS

Ambition.

CARIO

Gruel.

CHREMYLUS

Military advancement.

CARIO

Lentil soup.

CHREMYLUS

But of you they never tire. If a man has thirteen talents, he has all the greater ardour to possess sixteen; if that wish is achieved, he will want forty or will complain that he knows not how to make both ends meet.

PLUTUS

All this, I suppose, is very true; there is but one point that makes me feel a bit uneasy.

CHREMYLUS

And that is?

PLUTUS

How could I use this power, which you say I have?

CHREMYLUS

Ah! they were quite right who said there's nothing more timorous than Plutus.

PLUTUS

No, no; it was a thief who calumniated me. Having broken into a house, he found everything locked up and could take nothing, so he dubbed my prudence fear.

CHREMYLUS

Don't be disturbed; if you support me zealously, I'll make you more sharp-sighted than Lynceus.

PLUTUS

And how should you be able to do that, you. who are but a mortal?

CHREMYLUS

I have great hope, after the answer Apollo gave me, shaking his sacred laurels the while.

PLUTUS

Is *he* in the plot then?

CHREMYLUS

Surely.

PLUTUS

Take care what you say.

CHREMYLUS

Never fear, friend; for, be well assured, that if it has to cost me my life, I will carry out what I have in my head.

CARIO

And I will help you, if you permit it.

CHREMYLUS

We shall have many other helpers as well—all the worthy folk who are wanting for bread.

PLUTUS

Ah! they'll prove sorry helpers.

CHREMYLUS

No, not so, once they've grown rich. But you, Cario, run quick . . .

CARIO

Where?

CHREMYLUS

. . . to call my comrades, the other husbandmen (you'll probably find the poor fellows toiling away in the fields), that each of them may come here to take his share of the gifts of Plutus.

CARIO

I'm off. But let someone come from the house to take this morsel of meat.]

CHREMYLUS

I'll see to that; you run your hardest. As for you, Plutus, the most excellent of all the gods, come in here with me; this is the house you must fill with riches to-day, by fair means or foul.

PLUTUS

I don't at all like going into other folks' houses in this manner; I have never got any good from it. If I got inside a miser's house, straightway he would bury me deep underground; if some honest fellow among his friends came to ask him for the smallest coin, he would deny ever having seen me. Then if I went to a fool's house, he would sacrifice in dicing and wenching, and very soon I should be completely stripped and pitched out of doors.

CHREMYLUS

That's because you have never met a man who knew how to avoid the two extremes; moderation is the strong point in my character. I love saving as much as anybody, and I know how to spend, when it's needed. But let us go in; I want to make you known to my wife and to my only son, whom I love most of all after yourself.

PLUTUS

I'm quite sure of that.

CHREMYLUS

Why should I hide the truth from you?

(*They enter* CHREMYLUS' *house.*)

CARIO (*to the* CHORUS, *which has followed him in*)

Come, you active workers, who, like my master, eat nothing but garlic and the poorest food, you who are his friends and his neighbours, hasten your steps, hurry yourselves; there's not a moment to lose; this is the critical hour, when your presence and your support are needed by him.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why, don't you see we are speeding as fast as men can, who are already enfeebled by age? But do you deem it fitting to make us run like this before ever telling us why your master has called us?

CARIO

I've grown hoarse with the telling, but you won't listen. My master is going to drag you all out of the stupid, sapless life you are leading and ensure you one full of all delights.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And how is he going to manage that?

CARIO

My poor friends, he has brought with him a disgusting old fellow, all bent and wrinkled, with a most pitiful appearance, bald and toothless; upon my word, I even believe he is circumcised like some vile barbarian.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This news is worth its weight in gold! What are you saying? Repeat it to me; no doubt it means he is bringing back a heap of wealth.

CARIO

No, but a heap of all the infirmities attendant on old age.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you are tricking us, you shall pay us for it. Beware of our sticks!

CARIO

Do you deem me so brazen as all that, and my words mere lies?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What serious airs the rascal puts on! Look! his legs are already shrieking, "oh! oh!" They are asking for the shackles and wedges.

CARIO

It's in the tomb that it's your lot to judge. Why don't you go there? Charon has given you your ticket.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Plague take you! you cursed rascal, who rail at us and have not even the heart to tell us why your master has made us come. We were pressed for time and tired out, yet we came with all haste, and in our hurry we have passed by lots of wild onions without even gathering them.

CARIO

I will no longer conceal the truth from you. Friends, it's Plutus whom my master brings, Plutus, who will give you riches.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What! we shall really all become rich?

CARIO

Aye, certainly; you will then be Midases, provided you grow ass's ears.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What joy, what happiness! If what you tell me is true, I long to dance with delight.

CARIO (*singing, with appropriate gestures*)

And I too, *threttanelo!* I want to imitate the Cyclops and lead your troop by stamping like this. Do you, my dear little ones, cry, aye, cry again and bleat forth the plaintive song of the sheep and of the stinking goats; follow me like lascivious goats with their tools out.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

(*Singing, to the same tune and with similar mimicry*)

As for us, *threttanelo!* we will seek you, dear Cyclops, bleating, and if we find you with your wallet full of fresh herbs, all disgusting in your filth, sodden with wine and sleeping in the midst of your sheep, we will seize a great flaming stake and burn out your eye.

CARIO

I will copy that Circé of Corinth, whose potent philtres compelled the companions of Philonides like swine to swallow balls of dung, which she herself had kneaded with her hands; and do you too grunt with joy and follow your mother, my little pigs.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! Circé with the potent philtres, who besmear your companions so filthily, what pleasure I shall have in imitating the son of Laertes! I will hang you up by your balls, I will rub your nose with dung like a goat, and like Aristyllus you shall say through your half-opened lips, "Follow your mother, my little pigs."

CARIO

Enough of tomfoolery, assume a grave demeanour; unknown to my master I am going to take bread and meat; and when I have fed well, I shall resume my work.

(*Interlude of dancing by the* CHORUS.)

CHREMYLUS (*coming out of his house*)

To say, "Hail! my dear neighbours!" is an old form of greeting and well worn with use; so therefore I embrace you, because you have not crept like tortoises, but have come rushing here in all haste. Now help me to watch carefully and closely over the god.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Be at ease. You shall see with what martial zeal I will guard him. What! we jostle each other at the Assembly for three obols, and am I going to let Plutus in person be stolen from me?

CHREMYLUS

But I see Blepsidemus; by his bearing and his haste I can readily see he knows or suspects something.

BLEPSIDEMUS

What has happened then? Whence, how has Chremylus suddenly grown rich? I don't believe a word of it. Nevertheless, nothing but his sudden fortune was being talked about in the barber-shops. But I am above all surprised that his good fortune has not made him forget his friends; that is not the usual way!

CHREMYLUS

By the gods, Blepsidemus, I will hide nothing from you. To-day things are better than yesterday; let us share, for are you not my friend?

BLEPSIDEMUS

Have you really grown rich as they say?

CHREMYLUS

I shall be soon, if the god agrees to it. But there is still some risk to run.

BLEPSIDEMUS

What risk?

CHREMYLUS

Well . . .

BLEPSIDEMUS

Tell me, quick!

CHREMYLUS

If we succeed, we are happy for ever, but if we fail, it is all over with us.

BLEPSIDEMUS

It's a bad business, and one that doesn't please me! To grow rich all at once and yet to be fearful! ah! I suspect something that's little good.

CHREMYLUS

What do you mean?

BLEPSIDEMUS

No doubt you have just stolen some gold and silver from some temple and are repenting.

CHREMYLUS

Nay! heaven preserve me from that!

BLEPSIDEMUS

A truce to idle phrases! the thing is only too apparent, my friend.

CHREMYLUS

Don't suspect such a thing of me.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Alas! then there is no honest man! not one, that can resist the attraction of gold!

CHREMYLUS

By Demeter, you have no common sense.

BLEPSIDEMUS (*aside*)

How he has changed!

CHREMYLUS

But, good gods, you are mad, my dear fellow!

BLEPSIDEMUS (*aside*)

His very look is distraught; he has done some crime!

CHREMYLUS

Ah! I know the tune you are playing now; you think I have stolen, and want your share.

BLEPSIDEMUS

My share of what, pray?

CHREMYLUS

You are beside the mark; the thing is quite otherwise.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Perhaps it's not a theft, but some piece of knavery!

CHREMYLUS

You are insane!

BLEPSIDEMUS

What? You have done no man an injury?

CHREMYLUS

No! assuredly not!

BLEPSIDEMUS

But, great gods, what am I to think? You won't tell me the truth.

CHREMYLUS

You accuse me without really knowing anything.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Listen, friend, no doubt the matter can yet be hushed up, before it gets noised abroad, at trifling expense; I will buy the orators' silence.

CHREMYLUS

Aye, you will lay out three minae and, as my friend, you will reckon twelve against me.

BLEPSIDEMUS

I know someone who will come and seat himself at the foot of the tribunal, holding a supplicant's bough in his hand and surrounded by his wife and children, for all the world like the *Heraclidae* of Pamphilus.

CHREMYLUS

Not at all, poor fool! But, thanks to me, worthy folk alone shall be rich henceforth.

BLEPSIDEMUS

What are you saying? Have you then stolen so much as all that?

CHREMYLUS

Oh! your insults will be the death of me.

BLEPSIDEMUS

You're the one who is courting death.

CHREMYLUS

Not so, you wretch, since I have Plutus.

BLEPSIDEMUS

You have Plutus? Which one?

CHREMYLUS

The god himself.

BLEPSIDEMUS

And where is he?

CHREMYLUS

There.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Where?

CHREMYLUS

Indoors.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Indoors?

CHREMYLUS

Aye, certainly.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Get you gone! Plutus in your house?

CHREMYLUS

Yes, by the gods!

BLEPSIDEMUS

Are you telling the truth?

CHREMYLUS

I am.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Swear it by Hestia.

CHREMYLUS

I swear it by Posidon.

BLEPSIDEMUS

The god of the sea?

CHREMYLUS

Yes, and by all the other Posidons, if such there be.

BLEPSIDEMUS

And you don't send him to us, to your friends?

CHREMYLUS

We've not got to that point yet.

BLEPSIDEMUS

What do you say? Is there no chance of sharing?

CHREMYLUS

Why, no. We must first . . .

BLEPSIDEMUS

Do what?

CHREMYLUS

. . . restore him his sight.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Restore whom his sight? Speak!

CHREMYLUS

Plutus. It must be done, no matter how.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Is he then really blind?

CHREMYLUS

Yes, undoubtedly.

BLEPSIDEMUS

I am no longer surprised he never came to me.

CHREMYLUS

If it please the gods, he'll come there now.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Must we not go and seek a physician?

CHREMYLUS

Seek physicians at *Athens*? Nay! there's no art where there's no fee.[3]

BLEPSIDEMUS (*running his eyes over the audience*)

Let's look carefully.

CHREMYLUS (*after a thorough survey*)

There is not one.

BLEPSIDEMUS

It's a positive fact; I don't know of one.

CHREMYLUS

But I have thought the matter well over, and the best thing is to make Plutus lie in the Temple of Asclepius.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Unquestionably that's the very best thing. Hurry and lead him away to the temple.

CHREMYLUS

I am going there.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Then hurry up.

CHREMYLUS

That's just what I am doing.

(*They are just leaving when* POVERTY *comes running in; she is a picture of squalor and the two men recoil in horror.*)

POVERTY

Unwise, perverse, unholy men! What are you daring to do, you pitiful, wretched mortals? Whither are you flying? Stop! I command it!

BLEPSIDEMUS

Oh! great gods!

POVERTY

My arm shall destroy you, you infamous beings! Such an attempt is not to be borne; neither man nor god has ever dared the like. You shall die!

CHREMYLUS

And who are you? Oh! what a ghastly pallor!

BLEPSIDEMUS

Perhaps it's some Erinys, some Fury, from the theatre; there's a kind of wild tragic look in her eyes.

CHREMYLUS

But she has no torch.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Let's knock her down!

POVERTY

Who do you think I am?

CHREMYLUS

Some wine-shop keeper or egg-woman. Otherwise you would not have shrieked so loud at us, who have done nothing to you.

POVERTY

Indeed? And have you not done me the most deadly injury by seeking to banish me from every country?

CHREMYLUS

Why, have you not got the Barathrum left? But who are you? Answer me quickly!

POVERTY

I am one that will punish you this very day for having wanted to make me disappear from here.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Might it be the tavern-keeper in my neighbourhood, who is always cheating me in measure?

POVERTY

I am Poverty, who have lived with you for so many years.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Oh! great Apollo! oh, ye gods! whither shall I fly?

(*He starts to run away.*)

CHREMYLUS

Here! what are you doing! You coward! Are going to leave me here?

BLEPSIDEMUS (*still running*)

Not I.

CHREMYLUS

Stop then! Are two men to run away from one woman?

BLEPSIDEMUS

But, you wretch, it's Poverty, the most fearful monster that ever drew breath.

CHREMYLUS

Stay where you are, I beg of you.

BLEPSIDEMUS

No! no! a thousand times, no!

CHREMYLUS

Could we do anything worse than leave the god in the lurch and fly before this woman without so much as ever offering to fight?

BLEPSIDEMUS

But what weapons have we? Are we in a condition to show fight? Where is the breastplate, the buckler, that this wretch has not pawned?

CHREMYLUS

Be at ease. Plutus will readily triumph over her threats unaided.

POVERTY

Dare you reply, you scoundrels, you who are caught red-handed at the most horrible crime?

CHREMYLUS

As for you, you cursed jade, you pursue me with your abuse, though I have never done you the slightest harm.

POVERTY

Do you think it is doing me no harm to restore Plutus to the use of his eyes?

CHREMYLUS

Is this doing you harm, that we shower blessings on all men?

POVERTY

And what do you think will ensure their happiness?

CHREMYLUS

Ah! first of all we shall drive you out of Greece.

POVERTY

Drive me out? Could you do mankind a greater harm?

CHREMYLUS

Yes—if I gave up my intention to deliver them from you.

POVERTY

Well, let us discuss this point first. I propose to show that I am the sole cause of all your blessings, and that your safety depends on me alone. If I don't succeed, then do what you like to me.

CHREMYLUS

How dare you talk like this, you impudent hussy?

POVERTY

Agree to hear me and I think it will be very easy for me to prove that you are entirely on the wrong road, when you want to make the just men wealthy.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Oh! cudgel and rope's end, come to my help!

POVERTY

Why such wrath and these shouts, before you hear my arguments?

BLEPSIDEMUS

But who could listen to such words without exclaiming?

POVERTY

Any man of sense.

CHREMYLUS

But if you lose your case, what punishment will you submit to?

POVERTY

Choose what you will.

CHREMYLUS

That's all right.

POVERTY

You shall suffer the same if you are beaten!

CHREMYLUS

Do you think twenty deaths a sufficiently large stake?

BLEPSIDEMUS

Good enough for her, but for us two would suffice.

POVERTY

You won't escape, for is there indeed a single valid argument to oppose me with?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

To beat her in this debate, you must call upon all your wits. Make no allowances and show no weakness!

CHREMYLUS

It is right that the good should be happy, that the wicked and the impious, on the other hand, should be miserable; that is a truth, I believe, which no one will gainsay. To realize this condition of things is a proposal as great as it is noble and useful in every respect, and we have found a means of attaining the object of our wishes. If Plutus recovers his sight and ceases from wandering about unseeing and at random, he will go to seek the just men and never leave them again; he will shun the perverse and ungodly; so, thanks to him, all men will become honest, rich and pious. Can anything better be conceived for the public weal?

BLEPSIDEMUS

Of a certainty, no! I bear witness to that. It is not even necessary she should reply.

CHREMYLUS

Does it not seem that everything is extravagance in the world, or rather madness, when you watch the way things go? A crowd of rogues enjoy

blessings they have won by sheer injustice, while more honest folks are miserable, die of hunger, and spend their whole lives with you. Now, if Plutus became clear-sighted again and drove out Poverty, it would be the greatest blessing possible for the human race.

POVERTY

Here are two old men, whose brains are easy to confuse, who assist each other to talk rubbish and drivel to their hearts' content. But if your wishes were realized, your profit would be great! Let Plutus recover his sight and divide his favours out equally to all, and none will ply either trade or art any longer; all toil would be done away with. Who would wish to hammer iron, build ships, sew, turn, cut up leather, bake bricks, bleach linen, tan hides, or break up the soil of the earth with the plough and garner the gifts of Demeter, if he could live in idleness and free from all this work?

CHREMYLUS

What nonsense all this is! All these trades which you just mention will be plied by our slaves.

POVERTY

Your slaves! And by what means will these slaves be got?

CHREMYLUS

We will buy them.

POVERTY

But first say, who will sell them, if everyone is rich?

CHREMYLUS

Some greedy dealer from Thessaly—the land which supplies so many.

POVERTY

But if your system is applied, there won't be a single slave-dealer left. What rich man would risk his life to devote himself to this traffic? You will have to toil, to dig and submit yourself to all kinds of hard labour; so that your life would be more wretched even than it is now.

CHREMYLUS

May this prediction fall upon yourself!

POVERTY

You will not be able to sleep in a bed, for no more will ever be manufactured; nor on carpets, for who would weave them, if he had gold? When you bring a young bride to your dwelling, you will have no essences wherewith to perfume her, nor rich embroidered cloaks dyed with dazzling

colours in which to clothe her. And yet what is the use of being rich, if you are to be deprived of all these enjoyments? On the other hand, you have all that you need in abundance, thanks to me; to the artisan I am like a severe mistress, who forces him by need and poverty to seek the means of earning his livelihood.

CHREMYLUS

And what good thing can you give us, unless it be burns in the bath,[4] and swarms of brats and old women who cry with hunger, and clouds uncountable of lice, gnats and flies, which hover about the wretch's head, trouble him, awake him and say, "You will be hungry, but get up!" Besides, to possess a rag in place of a mantle, a pallet of rushes swarming with bugs, that do not let you close your eyes, for a bed; a rotten piece of matting for a coverlet; a big stone for a pillow, on which to lay your head; to eat mallow roots instead of bread, and leaves of withered radish instead of cake; to have nothing but the cover of a broken jug for a stool, the stave of a cask, and broken at that, for a kneading-trough, that is the life you make for us! Are these the mighty benefits with which you pretend to load mankind?

POVERTY

It's not my life that you describe; you are attacking the existence beggars lead.

CHREMYLUS

Is Beggary not Poverty's sister?

POVERTY

Thrasybulus and Dionysius are one and the same according to you. No, my life is not like that and never will be. The beggar, whom you have depicted to us, never possesses anything. The poor man lives thriftily and attentive to his work; he has not got too much, but he does not lack what he really needs.

CHREMYLUS

Oh! what a happy life, by Demeter! to live sparingly, to toil incessantly and not to leave enough to pay for a tomb!

POVERTY

That's it! Jest, jeer, and never talk seriously! But what you don't know is this, that men with me are worth more, both in mind and body, than with Plutus. With him they are gouty, big-bellied, heavy of limb and scandalously stout; with me they are thin, wasp-waisted, and terrible to the foe.

CHREMYLUS

No doubt it's by starving them that you give them that waspish waist.

POVERTY

As for behaviour, I will prove to you that modesty dwells with me and insolence with Plutus.

CHREMYLUS

Oh! the sweet modesty of stealing and burglary.

POVERTY

Look at the orators in our republics; as long as they are poor, both state and people can only praise their uprightness; but once they are fattened on the public funds, they conceive a hatred for justice, plan intrigues against the people and attack the democracy.

CHREMYLUS

That is absolutely true, although your tongue is very vile. But it matters not, so don't put on those triumphant airs; you shall not be punished any the less for having tried to persuade me that poverty is worth more than wealth.

POVERTY

Not being able to refute my arguments, you chatter at random and exert yourself to no purpose.

CHREMYLUS

Then tell me this, why does all mankind flee from you?

POVERTY

Because I make them better. Children do the very same; they flee from the wise counsels of their fathers. So difficult is it to see one's true interest.

CHREMYLUS

Will you say that Zeus cannot discern what is best? Well, he takes Plutus to himself . . .

BLEPSIDEMUS

. . . and banishes Poverty to the earth.

POVERTY

Ah me! how purblind you are, you old fellows of the days of Cronus! Why, Zeus is poor, and I will clearly prove it to you. In the Olympic games, which he founded, and to which he convokes the whole of Greece every four years, why does he only crown the victorious athletes with wild olive? If he were rich he would give them gold.

CHREMYLUS

That's the way he shows that he clings to his wealth; he is sparing with it, won't part with any portion of it, only bestows baubles on the victors and keeps his money for himself.

POVERTY

But wealth coupled to such sordid greed is yet more shameful than poverty.

CHREMYLUS

May Zeus destroy you, both you and your chaplet of wild olive!

POVERTY

Thus you dare to maintain that Poverty is not the fount of all blessings!

CHREMYLUS

Ask Hecaté whether it is better to be rich or starving; she will tell you that the rich send her a meal every month and that the poor make it disappear before it is even served. But go and hang yourself and don't breathe another syllable. I will not be convinced against my will.

POVERTY

"Oh! citizens of Argos! do you hear what he says?" [5]

CHREMYLUS

Invoke Pauson, your boon companion, rather.

POVERTY

Alas! what is to become of me?

CHREMYLUS

Get you gone, be off quick and a pleasant journey to you.

POVERTY

But where shall I go?

CHREMYLUS

To gaol; but hurry up, let us put an end to this.

POVERTY (*as she departs*)

One day you will recall me.

CHREMYLUS

Then you can return; but disappear for the present. I prefer to be rich; you are free to knock your head against the walls in your rage.

BLEPSIDEMUS

And I too welcome wealth. I want, when I leave the bath all perfumed with essences, to feast bravely with my wife and children and to fart in the faces of toilers and Poverty.

CHREMYLUS

So that hussy has gone at last! But let us make haste to put Plutus to bed in the Temple of Asclepius.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Let us make haste; else some bothering fellow may again come to interrupt us.

CHREMYLUS (*loudly*)

Cario, bring the coverlets and all that I have got ready from the house; let us conduct the god to the temple, taking care to observe all the proper rites.

(CARIO *comes out of the house with a bundle under one arm and leading* PLUTUS *with the other.* CHREMYLUS *and* BLEPSIDEMUS *join him and all four of them depart.*)

(*Interlude of dancing by the* CHORUS.)

CARIO

Oh! you old fellows, who used to dip out the broth served to the poor at the festival of Theseus with little pieces of bread hollowed like a spoon, how worthy of envy is your fate! How happy you are, both you and all just men!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

My good fellow, what has happened to your friends? You seem the bearer of good tidings.

CARIO

What joy for my master and even more for Plutus! The god has regained his sight; his eyes sparkle with the greatest brilliancy, thanks to the benevolent care of Asclepius.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! what transports of joy! oh! what shouts of gladness!

CARIO

Aye! one is compelled to rejoice, whether one will or not.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I will sing to the honour of Asclepius, the son of illustrious Zeus, with a resounding voice; he is the beneficent star which men adore.

CHREMYLUS' WIFE (*coming out of the house*)

What mean these shouts? Is there good news? With what impatience have I been waiting in the house, and for so long too!

CARIO

Quick! quick, some wine, mistress. And drink some yourself, (*aside*) it's much to your taste. I bring you all blessings in a lump.

WIFE

Where are they?

CARIO

In my words, as you are going to see.

WIFE

Have done with trifling! come, speak.

CARIO

Listen, I am going to tell you everything from the feet to the head

WIFE

Oh! don't throw anything at my head.

CARIO

Not even the happiness that has come to you?

WIFE

No, no, nothing . . . to annoy me.

CARIO

Having arrived near to the temple with our patient, then so unfortunate, but now at the apex of happiness, of blessedness, we first led him down to the sea to purify him.

WIFE

Ah! what a singular pleasure for an old man to bathe in the cold sea-water!

CARIO (*in the manner of the tragic messenger*)

Then we repaired to the temple of the god. Once the wafers and the various offerings had been consecrated upon the altar, and the cake of wheaten-meal had been handed over to the devouring Hephaestus, we made Plutus lie on a couch according to the rite, and each of us prepared himself a bed of leaves.

WIFE

Had any other folk come to beseech the deity?

CARIO

Yes. Firstly, Neoclides, who is blind, but steals much better than those who see clearly; then many others attacked by complaints of all kinds. The lights were put out and the priest enjoined us to sleep, especially recommending us to keep silent should we hear any noise. There we were all lying down quite quietly. I could not sleep; I was thinking of a certain stew-pan full of pap placed close to an old woman and just behind her head. I had a furious longing to slip towards that side. But just as I was lifting my head, I noticed the priest, who was sweeping off both the cakes and the figs on the sacred table; then he made the round of the altars and sanctified the cakes that remained, by stowing them away in a bag. I therefore resolved to follow such a pious example and made straight for the pap.

WIFE

You rogue! and had you no fear of the god?

CARIO

Aye, indeed! I feared that the god with his crown on his head might have been near the stew-pan before me. I said to myself, "Like priest, like god." On hearing the noise I made, the old woman put out her hand, but I hissed and bit it, just as a sacred serpent might have done." Quick she drew back her hand, slipped down into the bed with her head beneath the coverlets and never moved again; only she let flee a fart in her fear which stank worse than a weasel. As for myself, I swallowed a goodly portion of the pap and, having made a good feed, went back to bed.

WIFE

And did not the god come?

CARIO

He did not tarry; and when he was near us, oh! dear! such a good joke happened. My belly was quite blown up, and I let a *thunderous* fart!

WIFE

Doubtless the god pulled a wry face?

CARIO

No, but Iaso blushed a little and Panacea turned her head away, holding her nose; my farts are not perfume.

WIFE

And what did the god do?

CARIO

He paid not the slightest heed.

WIFE

He must then be a pretty coarse kind of god?

CARIO

I don't say that, but he's used to tasting stools.

WIFE

Impudent knave, go on with you!

CARIO

Then I hid myself in my bed all a-tremble. Asclepius did the round of the patients and examined them all with great attention; then a slave placed beside him a stone mortar, a pestle and a little box.

WIFE

Of stone?

CARIO

No, not of stone.

WIFE

But how could you see all this, you arch-rascal, when you say you were hiding all the time?

CARIO

Why, great gods, through my cloak, for it's not without holes! He first prepared an ointment for Neoclides; he threw three heads of Tenian garlic into the mortar, pounded them with an admixture of fig-tree sap and lentisk, moistened the whole with Sphettian vinegar, and, turning back the patient's eyelids, applied his salve to the interior of the eyes, so that the pain might be more excruciating. Neoclides shrieked, howled, sprang towards the foot of his bed and wanted to bolt, but the god laughed and said to him, "Keep where you are with your salve; by doing this you will not go and perjure yourself before the Assembly."

WIFE

What a wise god and what a friend to our city!

CARIO

Thereupon he came and seated himself at the head of Plutus' bed, took a perfectly clean rag and wiped his eyelids; Panacea covered his head and face with a purple cloth, while the god whistled, and two enormous snakes came rushing from the sanctuary.

WIFE

Great gods!

CARIO

They slipped gently beneath the purple cloth and, as far as I could judge, licked the patient's eyelids; for, in less time than even you need, mistress, to drain down ten beakers of wine, Plutus rose up; he could see. I clapped my hands with joy and awoke my master, and the god immediately disappeared with the serpents into the sanctuary. As for those who were lying near Plutus, you can imagine that they embraced him tenderly. Dawn broke and not one of them had closed an eye. As for myself, I did not cease thanking the god who had so quickly restored to Plutus his sight and had made Neoclides blinder than ever.

WIFE

Oh! thou great Asclepius! How mighty is thy power! (*To* CARIO) But tell me, where is Plutus now?

CARIO

He is approaching, escorted by an immense crowd. The rich, whose wealth is ill-gotten, are knitting their brows and shooting at him looks of fierce hate, while the just folk, who led a wretched existence, embrace him and grasp his hand in the transport of their joy; they follow in his wake, their heads wreathed with garlands, laughing and blessing their deliverer; the old men make the earth resound as they walk together keeping time. Come, all of you, all, down to the very least, dance, leap and form yourselves into a chorus; no longer do you risk being told, when you go home, "There is no meal in the bag."

WIFE

And I, by Hecaté! I will string you a garland of cakes for the good tidings you have brought me.

CARIO

Hurry, make haste then; our friends are close at hand.

WIFE

I will go indoors to fetch some gifts of welcome, to celebrate these eyes that have just been opened.

(*She goes back into the house*)

CARIO

Meantime I am going forth to meet them.

(*Exit*)

(*Interlude of dancing by the* CHORUS.)

PLUTUS

I adore thee, oh! thou divine sun, and thee I greet, thou city, the beloved of Pallas; be welcome, thou land of Cecrops, which hast received

me. Alas! what manner of men I associated with! I blush to think of it. While, on the other hand, I shunned those who deserved my friendship; I knew neither the vices of the ones nor the virtues of the others. A two-fold mistake, and in both cases equally fatal! Ah! what a misfortune was mine! But I want to change everything; and in the future I mean to prove to mankind that, if I gave to the wicked, it was against my will.

CHREMYLUS (*to the wings*)

Get you gone! Oh! what a lot of friends spring into being when you are fortunate! They dig me with their elbows and bruise my shins to prove their affection. Each one wants to greet me. What a crowd of old fellows thronged round me on the market-place!

WIFE

Oh! thou, who art dearest of all to me, and thou too, be welcome! Allow me, Plutus, to shower these gifts of welcome over you in due accord with custom.

PLUTUS

No. This is the first house I enter after having regained my sight; I shall take nothing from it, for it is my place rather to give.

WIFE

Do you refuse these gifts?

PLUTUS

I will accept them at your fireside, as custom requires. Besides, we shall thus avoid a ridiculous scene; it is not meet that the poet should throw dried figs and dainties to the spectators; it is a vulgar trick to make them laugh.[7]

WIFE

You are right. Look! yonder's Dexinicus, who was already getting to his feet to catch the figs as they flew past him.

(*Interlude of dancing by the* CHORUS.)

CARIO

How pleasant it is, friends, to live well, especially when it costs nothing! What a deluge of blessings flood our household, and that too without our having wronged a single soul! Ah! what a delightful thing is wealth! The bin is full of white flour and the wine-jars run over with fragrant liquor; all the chests are crammed with gold and silver, it is a sight to see; the tank is full of oil, the phials with perfumes, and the garret with dried figs. Vinegar flasks, plates, stew-pots and all the platters are of brass; our rotten old wooden trenchers for the fish have to-day become dishes of

silver; even the thunder-mug is of ivory. We others, the slaves, we play at odd and even with gold pieces, and carry luxury so far that we no longer wipe our arses with stones, but use garlic stalks instead. My master, at this moment, is crowned with flowers and sacrificing a pig, a goat and a ram; it's the smoke that has driven me out, for I could no longer endure it, it hurt my eyes so.

(*A* JUST MAN *enters, followed by a small slave-lad who carries a threadbare cloak and a pair of badly worn sandals.*)

JUST MAN

Come, my child, come with me. Let us go and find the god.

CARIO

Who's this?

JUST MAN

A man who was once wretched, but now is happy.

CARIO

A just man then?

JUST MAN

That's right.

CARIO

Well! what do you want?

JUST MAN

I come to thank the god for all the blessings he has showered on me. My father had left me a fairly decent fortune, and I helped those of my friends who were in want; it was, to my thinking, the most useful thing I could do with my fortune.

CARIO

And you were quickly ruined?

JUST MAN

Quite.

CARIO

And since then you have been living in misery?

JUST MAN

Quite; I thought I could count, in case of need, upon the friends whose property I had helped, but they turned their backs upon me and pretended not to see me.

CARIO

They laughed at you, that's obvious.

JUST MAN

Quite. With my empty coffers, I had no more friends. But my lot has changed, and so I come to the god to make him the acts of gratitude that are his due.

CARIO

But why are you bringing this old cloak, which your slave is carrying? Tell me.

JUST MAN

I wish to dedicate it to the god.

CARIO

Were you initiated into the Great Mysteries in that cloak? [8]

JUST MAN

No, but I shivered in it for thirteen years.

CARIO

And this footwear?

JUST MAN

These also are my winter companions.

CARIO

And you wish to dedicate them too?

JUST MAN

Certainly.

CARIO

Fine presents to offer to the god!

(*An* INFORMER *enters, followed by a witness*)

INFORMER (*before he sees* CARIO)

Alas! alas! I am a lost man. Ah! thrice, four, five, twelve times, or rather ten thousand times unhappy fate! Why, why must fortune deal me such rough blows?

CARIO

Oh, Apollo, my tutelary! oh! ye favourable gods! what has overtaken this man?

INFORMER (*to* CARIO)

Ah! am I not deserving of pity? I have lost everything; this cursed god has stripped me bare. Ah! if there be justice in heaven, he shall be struck blind again.

JUST MAN

I think I know what's the matter. If this man is unfortunate, it's because he's of little account and small honesty; and indeed he looks it too.

CARIO

Then, by Zeus! his plight is but just.

INFORMER

He promised that if he recovered his sight, he would enrich us all unaided; whereas he has ruined more than one.

CARIO

But whom has he thus ill-used?

INFORMER

Me.

CARIO

You were doubtless a villainous thief then.

INFORMER

No, it is rather you yourselves who were such wretches; I am certain you have got my money.

CARIO

Ha! by Demeter! an informer! What impudence! He's ravenously hungry, that's certain.

INFORMER

You shall follow me this very instant to the market-place, where the torture of the wheel shall force the confession of your misdeeds from you.

CARIO (*with a threatening gesture*)

Watch out, now!

JUST MAN

By Zeus the Deliverer, what gratitude all Greeks owe to Plutus, if he destroys these vile informers!

INFORMER

You are laughing at me. Well, then I denounce you as their accomplice. Where did you steal that new cloak from? Yesterday I saw you with one utterly worn out.

JUST MAN

I fear you not, thanks to this ring, for which I paid Eudemus a drachma.

CARIO

Ah! there's no ring to preserve you from the informer's bite.

INFORMER

The insolent wretches! But, my fine jokers, you have not told me what you are up to here. Nothing good, I'm sure of that.

CARIO

Nothing of any good for you, be sure of *that*.

INFORMER

By Zeus! it's at my expense that you are about to dine.

CARIO

You and your witness, I hope you both burst . . .

JUST MAN

With an empty belly.

INFORMER

You deny it? I reckon, you villains, that there is much salt fish and roast meat in this house. (*He sniffs elaborately.*)

CARIO

Can you smell anything, rascal?

JUST MAN

The cold, perhaps.

INFORMER

Can such outrages be borne, oh, Zeus! Ye gods! how cruel it is to see me treated thus, when I am such an honest fellow and such a good citizen!

JUST MAN

You an honest man! you a good citizen!

INFORMER

A better one than any.

JUST MAN

Ah! well then, answer my questions.

INFORMER

Concerning what?

JUST MAN

Are you a husbandman?

INFORMER

D'ye take me for a fool?

JUST MAN

A merchant?

INFORMER

I assume the title, when it serves me.[9]

JUST MAN

Do you ply any trade?

INFORMER

No, most assuredly not!

JUST MAN

Then how do you live, if you do nothing?

INFORMER

I superintend public and private business.

JUST MAN

You do? And by what right, pray?

INFORMER

Because it pleases me to do so.

JUST MAN

Like a thief you sneak yourself in where you have no business. You are hated by all and you claim to be an honest man.

INFORMER

What, you fool? I have not the right to dedicate myself entirely to my country's service?

JUST MAN

Is the country served by vile intrigue?

INFORMER

It is served by watching that the established law is observed—by allowing no one to violate it.

JUST MAN

That's the duty of the tribunals; they are established to that end.

INFORMER

And who is the prosecutor before the dicasts?

JUST MAN

Whoever wishes to be.

INFORMER

Well then, it is I who choose to be prosecutor; and thus all public affairs fall within my province.

JUST MAN

I pity Athens for being in such vile clutches. But would you not prefer to live quietly and free from all care and anxiety?

INFORMER

To do nothing is to live an animal's life.

JUST MAN

Thus you will not change your mode of life?

INFORMER

No, though they gave me Plutus himself and the silphium of Battus.

CARIO (*to the* INFORMER)

Come, quick, off with your cloak.

(*The* INFORMER *does not move.*)

JUST MAN

Hi! friend! it's you they are speaking to.

CARIO

Off with your shoes.

(*The* INFORMER *still remains motionless.*)

JUST MAN

I say, all this is addressed to you.

INFORMER (*defiantly*)

Very well! let one of you come near me, if he dares.

CARIO

I dare.

(*He strips the* INFORMER *of his cloak and shoes. The witness runs away.*)

INFORMER

Alas! I am robbed of my clothes in full daylight.

CARIO

That's what comes of meddling with other folk's business and living at their expense.

INFORMER (*over his shoulder to the departing witness*)

You see what is happening; I call you to witness.

CARIO (*laughing*)

Look how the witness whom you brought is taking to his heels.

INFORMER

Great gods! I am all alone and they assault me.

CARIO

Shout away!

INFORMER

Oh! woe, woe is me!

CARIO

Give me that old ragged cloak, that I may dress out the informer.

JUST MAN

No, no; I have dedicated it to Plutus.

CARIO

And where would your offering be better bestowed than on the shoulders of a rascal and a thief? To Plutus fine, rich cloaks should be given.

JUST MAN

And what then shall be done with these shoes? Tell me.

CARIO

I will nail them to his brow as gifts are nailed to the trunks of the wild olive.

INFORMER

I'm off, for you are the strongest, I own. But if I find someone to join me, let him be as weak as he will, I will summon this god, who thinks himself so strong, before the court this very day, and denounce him as manifestly guilty of overturning the democracy by his will alone and without the consent of the Senate or the Assembly.

JUST MAN

Now that you are rigged out from head to foot with my old clothes, hasten to the bath and stand there in the front row to warm yourself better; that's the place I formerly had.

CARIO

Ah! the bath-man would grab you by the balls and fling you through the door; he would only need to see you to appraise you at your true value. . . . But let us go in, friend, that you may address your thanksgivings to the god.

(*Interlude of dancing by the* CHORUS.)

(*An* OLD WOMAN *enters, dressed as a young girl and trying to walk in a youthful and alluring manner. She carries a plate of food.*)

OLD WOMAN (*coyly*)

My *dear* old men, am I near the house where the new god lives, or have I missed the road?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You are at his door, my pretty little maid, who question us so sweetly.

OLD WOMAN

Then I will summon someone in the house.

CHREMYLUS

No need. I am here myself. But what brings you here?

OLD WOMAN

Ah! a cruel, unjust fate! My dear friend, this god has made life unbearable to me through ceasing to be blind.

CHREMYLUS

What does this mean? Can you be a female informer?

OLD WOMAN

Most certainly not.

CHREMYLUS

Have you *drunk* up your money then?

OLD WOMAN

You are mocking me! No! I am being devoured with a consuming fire.

CHREMYLUS

Then tell me what is consuming you so fiercely.

OLD WOMAN

Listen! I loved a young man, who was poor, but so handsome, so well-built, so honest! He readily gave way to all I desired and acquitted himself so well! I, for my part, refused him nothing.

CHREMYLUS

And what did he generally ask of you?

OLD WOMAN

Very little; he bore himself towards me with astonishing discretion! perchance twenty drachmae for a cloak or eight for footwear; sometimes he begged me to buy tunics for his sisters or a little mantle for his mother; at times he needed four bushels of corn.

CHREMYLUS

That's very little, in truth; I admire his modesty.

OLD WOMAN

And it wasn't as a reward for his complacency that he ever asked me for anything, but as a matter of pure friendship; a cloak I had given would remind him from whom he had got it.

CHREMYLUS

It was a fellow who loved you madly.

OLD WOMAN

But it's no longer so, for the faithless wretch has sadly altered! I had sent him this cake with the sweetmeats you see here on this dish and let him know that I would visit him in the evening . . .

CHREMYLUS

Well?

OLD WOMAN

He sent me back my presents and added this tart to them, on condition that I never set foot in his house again. Besides, he sent me this message, "Once upon a time the Milesians were brave."

CHREMYLUS

An honest lad, indeed! What do you expect? When poor, he would devour anything; now he is rich, he no longer cares for lentils.

OLD WOMAN

Formerly he came to me every day.

CHREMYLUS

To see if you were being buried?

OLD WOMAN

No! he longed to hear the sound of my voice.

CHREMYLUS (*aside*)
And to carry off some present.

OLD WOMAN
If I was downcast, he would call me his little duck or his little dove in a most tender manner . . .

CHREMYLUS (*aside*)
And then would ask for the money to buy a pair of sandals.

OLD WOMAN
When I was at the Mysteries of Eleusis in a carriage, someone made eyes at me; he was so jealous that he beat me the whole of that day.

CHREMYLUS (*aside*)
That was because he liked to feed alone.

OLD WOMAN
He told me I had very beautiful hands.

CHREMYLUS (*aside*)
Aye, no doubt, when they handed him twenty drachmae.

OLD WOMAN
That my whole body breathed a sweet perfume.

CHREMYLUS (*aside*)
Yes, like enough, if you poured him out Thasian wine.

OLD WOMAN
That my glance was gentle and charming.

CHREMYLUS (*aside*)
He was no fool. He knew how to drag drachmae from a sex-starved old woman.

OLD WOMAN
Ah! the god has done very, very wrong, saying he would support the victims of injustice.

CHREMYLUS
Well, what should he do? Speak, and it shall be done.

OLD WOMAN
Compel him, whom I have loaded with benefits, to repay them in his turn; if not, he does not merit the least of the god's favours.

CHREMYLUS
And did he not do this every night?

OLD WOMAN
He swore he would never leave me, as long as I lived.

CHREMYLUS
Aye, rightly; but he thinks you are no longer alive.

OLD WOMAN
Ah! friend, I am pining away with grief.

CHREMYLUS (*aside*)
You are *rotting* away, it seems to me.

OLD WOMAN
I have grown so thin, I could slip through a ring.

CHREMYLUS
Yes, if it were as large as the hoop of a sieve.
(*A young man enters, wearing a garland on his head and carrying a torch in his hand.*)

OLD WOMAN
But here is the youth, the cause of my complaint; he looks as though he were going to a festival.

CHREMYLUS
Yes, if his chaplet and his torch are any guides.

YOUTH (*to the* OLD WOMAN, *with cool politeness*)
Greeting to you.

OLD WOMAN (*in a puzzled tone*)
What was that he said?

YOUTH
My ancient old dear, you have grown white very quickly, by heaven!

OLD WOMAN
Oh! what an insult!

CHREMYLUS
It is a long time, then, since he saw you?

OLD WOMAN
A long time? My god! he was with me yesterday.

CHREMYLUS

It must be, then, that, unlike other people, he sees more clearly when he's drunk.

OLD WOMAN

No, but I have always known him for an insolent fellow.

YOUTH

Oh! divine Posidon! Oh, ye gods of old age! what wrinkles she has on her face!

(*He holds his torch close to her, in order to inspect her more closely.*)

OLD WOMAN

Oh! oh! keep your distance with that torch.

CHREMYLUS (*aside*)

It's just as well, if a single spark were to reach her, she would catch fire like an old olive branch.

YOUTH

I propose to have a game with you.

OLD WOMAN (*eagerly*)

Where, naughty boy?

YOUTH

Here. Take some nuts in your hand.

OLD WOMAN

What game is this?

YOUTH

Let's play at guessing how many . . . teeth you have.

CHREMYLUS

Ah! I'll tell you; she's got three, or perhaps four.

YOUTH

Pay up; you've lost! she has only one single grinder.

OLD WOMAN

You wretch! you're not in your right senses. Do you insult me thus before this crowd?

YOUTH

I am washing you thoroughly; that's doing you a service.

CHREMYLUS

No, no! as she is there, she can still deceive; but if this white-lead is washed off, her wrinkles will come out plainly.

OLD WOMAN

You are only an old fool!

YOUTH

Ah! he is playing the gallant, he is playing with your tits, and thinks I do not see it.

OLD WOMAN (*to* CHREMYLUS)

Oh! no, by Aphrodité, don't do that, you naughty jealous fellow.

CHREMYLUS

Oh! most certainly not, by Hecaté! Verily and indeed I would need to be mad! But, young man, I cannot forgive you, if you cast off this beautiful child.

YOUTH

Why, I adore her.

CHREMYLUS

But nevertheless she accuses you . . .

YOUTH

Accuses me of what?

CHREMYLUS

. . . of having told her insolently, "Once upon a time the Milesians were brave."

YOUTH

Oh! I shall not dispute with you about her.

CHREMYLUS

Why not?

YOUTH

Out of respect for your age; with anyone but you I should not be so easy; come, take the girl and be happy.

CHREMYLUS

I see, I see, you don't want her any more.

OLD WOMAN

Nay! this is a thing that cannot be allowed.

YOUTH

I cannot argue with a woman who has been laid by every one of these thirteen thousand men.

(*He points to the audience.*)

CHREMYLUS

Yet, since you liked the wine, you should now consume the lees.

YOUTH

But these lees are quite rancid and fusty.

CHREMYLUS

Pass them through a straining-cloth; they'll clarify.

YOUTH

But I want to go in with you to offer these chaplets to the god.

OLD WOMAN

And I too have something to tell him.

YOUTH

Then I won't enter.

CHREMYLUS

Come, have no fear; she won't harm you.

YOUTH

That's true; I've been managing the old bark so long.

OLD WOMAN

Go in; I'll follow after you.

(*They enter the house.*)

CHREMYLUS

Good gods! that old hag has fastened herself to her youth like a limpet to its rock.

(*He follows them in.*)

(*Interlude of dancing by the* CHORUS.)

(HERMES *enters and begins knocking on the door.*)

CARIO (*opening the door*)

Who is knocking at the door? Halloa! I see no one; it was then by chance it gave forth that plaintive tone.

HERMES (*to* CARIO, *who is about to close the door*)

Cario! stop!

CARIO

Eh! friend, was it you who knocked so loudly? Tell me.

HERMES

No, I was going to knock and you forestalled me by opening. Come, call your master quick, then his wife and his children, then his slave and his dog, then yourself and his pig.

CARIO

And what's it all about?

HERMES

It's about this, rascal! Zeus wants to serve you all with the same sauce and hurl the lot of you into the Barathrum.

CARIO (*aside*)

Have a care for your tongue, you bearer of ill tidings! (*To* HERMES) But why does he want to treat us in that scurvy fashion?

HERMES

Because you have committed the most dreadful crime. Since Plutus has recovered his sight, there is nothing for us other gods, neither incense, nor laurels, nor cakes, nor victims, nor anything in the world.

CARIO

And you will never be offered anything more; you governed us too ill

HERMES

I care nothing at all about the other gods, but it's myself. I tell you I am dying of hunger.

CARIO

That's reasoning like a wise fellow.

HERMES

Formerly, from earliest dawn, I was offered all sorts of good things in the wine-shops,—wine-cakes, honey, dried figs, in short, dishes worthy of Hermes. Now, I lie the livelong day on my back, with my legs in the air, famishing.

CARIO

And quite right too, for you often had them punished who treated you so well.

HERMES

Ah! the lovely cake they used to knead for me on the fourth of the month!

CARIO

You recall it vainly; your regrets are useless!

HERMES

Ah! the ham I was wont to devour!

CARIO

Well then! make use of your legs and hop on one leg upon the wine-skin,[10] to while away the time.

HERMES

Oh! the grilled entrails I used to swallow down!

CARIO

Your own have got the colic, I think.

HERMES

Oh! the delicious tipple, half-wine, half-water!

CARIO

Here, take this and be off. (*He farts.*)

HERMES (*in tragic style*)

Would you render service to the friend that loves you?

CARIO

Willingly, if I can.

HERMES

Give me some well-baked bread and a big hunk of the victims they are sacrificing in your house.

CARIO

That would be stealing.

HERMES

Do you forget, then, how I used to take care he knew nothing about it when you were stealing something from your master?

CARIO

Because I used to share it with you, you rogue; some cake or other always came your way.

HERMES

Which afterwards you ate up all by yourself.[11]

CARIO

But then you did not share the blows when I was caught.

HERMES

Forget past injuries, now you have taken Phylé. Ah! how I should like to live with you! Take pity and receive me.

CARIO

You would leave the gods to stop here?

HERMES

One is much better off among you.

CARIO

What! you would desert! Do you think that is honest?

HERMES

"Where I live well, there is my country."

CARIO

But how could we employ you here?

HERMES

Place me near the door; I am the watchman god and would shift off the robbers.

CARIO

Shift off! Ah! but we have no love for shifts.

HERMES

Entrust me with business dealings.

CARIO

But we are rich; why should we keep a haggling Hermes?

HERMES

Let me intrigue for you.

CARIO

No, no, intrigues are forbidden; we believe in good faith.

HERMES

I will work for you as a guide.

CARIO

But the god sees clearly now, so we no longer want a guide.

HERMES

Well then, I will preside over the games. Ah! what can you object to in that? Nothing is fitter for Plutus than to give scenic and gymnastic games.[12]

CARIO

How useful it is to have so many names! Here you have found the means of earning your bread. I don t wonder the jurymen so eagerly try to get entered for many tribunals.

HERMES

So then, you admit me on these terms?

CARIO

Go and wash the entrails of the victims at the well, so that you may show yourself serviceable at once.

(*They both enter the house. A* PRIEST *of* ZEUS *comes hurrying in.*)

PRIEST

Can anyone tell me where Chremylus is?

CHREMYLUS (*emerging from the house*)

What would you with him, friend?

PRIEST

Much ill. Since Plutus has recovered his sight, I am perishing of starvation; I, the priest of Zeus the Deliverer, have nothing to eat!

CHREMYLUS

And what is the cause of that, pray?

PRIEST

No one dreams of offering sacrifices.

CHREMYLUS

Why not?

PRIEST

Because all men are rich. Ah! when they had nothing, the merchant who escaped from shipwreck, the accused who was acquitted, all immolated victims, another would sacrifice for the success of some wish and the priest joined in at the feast; but now there is not the smallest victim, not one of the faithful in the temple, but thousands who come there to take a crap.

CHREMYLUS

Why don't you take your share of *those* offerings?

PRIEST (*ignoring this*)

Hence I think I too am going to say good-bye to Zeus the Deliverer, and stop here myself.

CHREMYLUS

Be at ease, all will go well, if it so please the god. Zeus the Deliverer is here; he came of his own accord.

PRIEST

Ha! that's good news.

(*He moves toward the door.*)

CHREMYLUS

Wait a little; we are going to install Plutus presently in the place he formerly occupied behind the Temple of Athené; there he will watch over our treasures for ever. (*Calling out*) Let lighted torches be brought to the priest. Take these and walk in solemn procession in front of the god.

PRIEST

That's magnificent!

CHREMYLUS

Let Plutus be summoned.

(PLUTUS *comes out of the house, followed by the* OLD WOMAN.)

OLD WOMAN

And I, what am I to do?

CHREMYLUS

Take the pots of vegetables which we are going to offer to the god in honour of his installation and carry them on your head; you just happen luckily to be wearing a beautiful embroidered robe.

OLD WOMAN

And what about the object of my coming?

CHREMYLUS

Everything shall be according to your wish. The young man will be with you this evening.

OLD WOMAN

Oh! if you promise me his visit, I will right willingly carry the pots.

(*She puts them on her head.*)

CHREMYLUS

Those are strange pots indeed! Generally the scum rises to the top of the pots, but here the pots are raised to the top of the old woman.[13]

(PLUTUS *begins to march solemnly off the stage; the* OLD WOMAN *follows him.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us withdraw without more tarrying, and follow the others, singing as we go

(*They do so.*)

1. A sacrifice had naturally preceded the consultation of the oracle, and Cario has brought home the remnants, which were customarily given to the other members of the household.

2. An imitation of the sound of plucked strings on a lyre.

3. This comedy exhibits numerous indications of the deplorable economic conditions prevalent at Athens in the early decades of the fourth century.

4. The baths were the refuge of the poor in the winter, and these unfortunates would seem to have sometimes got too close to the furnaces which heated the water.

5. A line from the lost *Telephus* of Euripides; Aristophanes had already quoted this in *The Knights* (813).

6. The temple of Asclepius naturally contained several of the snakes which were sacred to that deity.

7. This seems to have become a fairly common practice, and Aristophanes has already disclaimed it, in *The Wasps* (58).

8. The point of Cario's question is not entirely clear and has been variously explained; it seems probable that the clothes worn for initiation were the oldest ones possessed.

9. Merchants were exempt from military service and it was thus occasionally useful to be such a person.

10. At feasts of Dionysus a game was played in which the competitors hopped one-legged on a full and greased wine-skin

11. Hermes, as god of thefts, normally received offerings of cakes from Cario, but even these did not advantage him, for the slave would eat them soon after placing them on the altar. Such offerings were regularly consumed either by the priest of the god involved or by the person who had made the sacrifice.

12 Such spectacles were normally provided by the wealthy.

13. A pun on the two meanings of the Greek word *graus,* "old woman" and "scum."

THE PLAYS OF MENANDER

I

THE GIRL FROM SAMOS

Characters in the Play

Demeas, *an Athenian citizen*
Parmeno, *his domestic slave*
A Cook
Chrysis, *a Samian girl*
Niceratus, *neighbour of* Demeas
Moschion, Demeas' *adopted son*

INTRODUCTION

by L. A. Post

THE *Samia* or *Girl from Samos* is Menander's Comedy of Errors. The chief interest lies in plot and situation. At the same time the characters are well defined and sufficiently individual for the purposes of the play. There are two middle-aged men whose features stand out in vivid contrast. Demeas is well-to-do, good-humoured and peaceable. He likes to be comfortable himself and to have every one about him comfortable. There is a certain timidity about him that makes him scrupulous in his dealings with others. He would be very uncomfortable if he had actually wronged anyone, or if he were accused of injustice, whether rightly or wrongly. There is a genuine humanity in his willingness to befriend the unfortunate, but his judgment is sound and he would not willingly suffer impositions beyond certain limits. His own good-will is such that he has a genuine horror of real meanness or ingratitude. In fact his very tenderness might turn to fury if his comfortable confidence in the reciprocal affection and honesty of those about him were actually invaded by a brutal affront.

His neighbour, Niceratus, is on the other hand a very uncomfortable man. He is poor and honest, and his pride is inordinate. He is always on his guard against slights and strikes out at the slightest suspicion, and, since he is a very suspicious man, he is always striking out at those around him. He flaunts his poverty and his honesty, and his manners are intolerable. There is nothing in his position to induce respect; he must therefore compel respect by his irascibility. He has a wife and a daughter, Plangon. Naturally they are afraid of him. He has no dowry to give with his daughter, so that she can hardly hope to escape by marrying. It is not surprising that she should secretly have become attached to her wealthy neighbour's son, Moschion. This callow youth is in turn sincerely attached to her and shows the seriousness of his intentions by accepting all responsibility for the baby that is born to her. Like most young men in Greek

comedy, however, he is rather a heedless fellow. He has a nice sense of his own importance and is the hero of numerous romances which have no existence beyond his own imagination. As a matter of fact he is not really Demeas' son, but an adopted foundling. Of this he has no suspicion.

The little romance of Moschion and Plangon had been able to flourish undetected, largely because both Demeas and Niceratus were absent from Athens. It is their return that provides the complications of the plot. Naturally the lovers could hope for no sympathy from the stern Niceratus. It was essential that he should know nothing of the existence of his grandson, whom Plangon had been nursing for some time with the connivance of her mother. From Demeas on the other hand the young people had everything to hope. He was rich and generous, he might well be moved by entreaties to acquiesce in the marriage of the two lovers. The matter, however, required delicate handling. Above all it was necessary to gain time.

The other members of Demeas' household have not yet been mentioned. Demeas had no wife, but he had a mistress whose position in the household was practically that of a wife. She is Chrysis, the girl from Samos, whose fortunes provide the main interest of the play. She had been expelled from Samos, along with the other Athenian inhabitants, in the year 322, after the Macedonian victory over Athens. Arriving in Athens as a refugee, destitute even of the means of proving her identity, she had by her plight moved Demeas to compassion. He had taken her in and had made her his wife in all but name. Legally he could not marry her until she could prove her citizenship. Any children born of the union must be illegitimate. Under such circumstances it was the woman's duty to prevent the birth of children. Certainly it rested entirely with Demeas to decide whether children, if born, should be permitted to live. Now it so happened that Chrysis did bear a child in the absence of Demeas. Either she followed his orders and exposed it to die, or more probably (the plot is not certain) her baby died a natural death shortly before the father's return. There is no great improbability in the coincidence that both Chrysis and Plangon had babies. They were not necessarily born on the same date. We must merely suppose that, when the imminent arrival of Demeas and Niceratus made it necessary to conceal Plangon's baby, Chrysis was able and willing to act as temporary mother. She knew better than anyone the good humour and generosity of Demeas' nature. She was sure of his yielding in the end to Moschion's entreaties. In the meantime she could protect the child and say nothing of Moschion's interest in it. The servants of course had to be admitted to the secret. It probably did not seem a very dangerous secret to Demeas' steward Parmeno, so that he let Moschion and Chrysis arrange matters in their own way without any misgivings. In any case he took no responsibility upon himself.

It should be noted that the baby in *The Girl from Samos* is not a mute hero whose success story is the theme of the play, as in *The Arbitration,* but a symbol of the lasting union and serious intentions of the lovers. Menander could not use the device of a clandestine marriage that makes Romeo and Juliet one in spite of parents. The clandestine babe will do as well. He need not make his own way, for his father stands sponsor for him. It is accordingly about Moschion that the plot is spun. He gains as his allies in succession Chrysis, Demeas, and Niceratus. To the Greeks a baby without a wedding was a better guarantee of love and union than a wedding without a baby.

So Demeas and Niceratus came home. Niceratus did not find an unexpected infant, but Demeas did. What was Chrysis doing with a baby? It was certainly taking a liberty to bring up an infant without his permission, but after all he was fond of her. She would always have a home with him. It wasn't really the thing to do, but he hesitated, she entreated, and in the end he found her irresistible. Naturally it hadn't entered his head that he was not the child's father. In fact he was a little flattered that Chrysis should be so eager to make herself still further dependent on him. In the meantime he had news for Moschion. Moschion must marry Plangon. Demeas had incurred a great obligation to Niceratus (Niceratus may have saved his life at sea) and in order to repay it Moschion should take his daughter without a dowry. Moschion consented with alacrity. There was no need to mention the baby until Plangon was safely in his possession, when there could not possibly be any difficulty. So all was bustle and confusion. Parmeno was sent to the market for a cook and provisions. Niceratus gave orders to his wife and daughter and then departed to do his own catering in person. This was the situation at the end of the first act of the play.

But of course there really couldn't be a wedding until the end of the fifth act. The lovers' luck was too good to last. Misunderstandings soon come thick and fast until it looks as if there would be no wedding at all; and it is hard to get the misunderstandings explained because the truth itself involves some difficulties and because the misunderstandings are so terrible that they quite deprive the victims of the ability to listen to reason. One character after another loses his balance and contributes to the confusion. The discovery that calms one sets another going until the dance is ended. Chrysis and the baby come flying first from one house, then from the other. Comic irony is everywhere. It is always just the attempt to clear things up, to make the best of them, that introduces new complications. The general result is a rollicking farce, full of verve and wit, but not without a generous measure of sympathetic character-study and fine feeling for the decencies of life. It was probably explained in the prologue that Chrysis and Moschion were brother and sister, so that the

spectators could look forward to seeing Chrysis in the end restored to citizenship and united in lawful marriage to Demeas.

At the beginning of the part that has come down to us Demeas appears on the stage and relates an incident that has aroused his suspicion, not of the truth, that Chrysis is passing off Plangon's baby as her own, but of a far worse crime, that she has so far forgotten what was due to him as to form a connection with his son Moschion. If Moschion is the child's father and Chrysis its mother, her interest in the infant and her entreaties appear in a new and terrible light. This soliloquy does not interrupt the action of the play. It depicts with great skill the train of feeling that has been set going in the mind of Demeas and that turns him before our eyes from a genial, cautious, indulgent friend into a maniac, blind with jealousy and indignation.

THE GIRL FROM SAMOS

DEMEAS

(*He comes stealthily from his own house, evidently in great excitement about some problem that puzzles him. At last he communicates his situation to the spectators.*)

As soon as I was in the house, since I was all intent on getting ready for the wedding, I merely mentioned the situation to the household, and gave orders to get ready whatever would be needed, clean up, bake cakes, have the rites in order. It was all promptly under way, you may be sure, but the fact that they were hurrying operations produced some confusion, naturally. There was the baby screaming on a couch, where they had tossed it out of the way, and at the same time they kept shouting: "Give me some flour, water, olive oil, charcoal." Now I was handing out one thing and another myself and lending a hand, so, as it happened, I had gone into the pantry and was sorting out a number of things and investigating, so that I didn't come straight out again at once.

In the meantime, however, down from the floor above comes a woman into the room in front of the pantry. For there happens to be a weaving-room, which you must pass through either to get upstairs or into the pantry. Moschion's nurse the woman was, she's an old woman, who has been a slave of mine, but has her freedom now. So when she saw the baby screaming unattended to, since she had no idea that I was in there, she thought it was quite safe to speak freely and went to it. Then after she had made the usual remarks: "Darling baby! Precious blessing! But where's its mamma," she kissed it and walked up and down with it until it stopped crying. Then she exclaimed: "Oh my goodness, only day before yesterday Moschion himself was like that and I used to nurse and fondle him; and now here's a babe of his for someone else to nurse [and see grow up to be a father. . . ." *Here the text is faulty.*] Just then a slave girl ran in from outside and the old woman said to her: "Give the baby his bath, for goodness' sake. What does it mean? Don't you look after the baby when his father's getting married?" Then the girl says quickly: "Confound you, how loud you're talking! The master's in there." "Indeed he isn't? Where?" "In the pantry." Then raising her voice: "The

mistress wants you, nurse. Move and be quick about it. He hasn't heard you. That's very lucky." And the old woman exclaiming: "Heaven help me how I chatter!" took herself off somewhere or other.

I meanwhile sauntered out very quietly, just the way you saw me come from the house, as if I had heard nothing and hadn't noticed a thing. As I came along, however, I took note that it was the girl from Samos herself who had it and was suckling it, so one thing's certain, it's her baby, but who the father is, whether it's mine or . . . But I refuse to pronounce the words to you, gentlemen, or to think them either. I simply state the case and report what I heard myself without upbraiding anyone for the present. I can bear witness, before God I can, that the boy has always behaved himself up to now, and has recognized his duty to me perfectly. On the other hand, though, when I realize that the words were spoken, in the first place, by his old nurse, and, in the second place, that she didn't mean me to hear; and then when I call to mind how the woman fondled it and insisted on keeping it in spite of me, I'm absolutely furious.

(*As* DEMEAS *reaches the point where he can stand the strain no longer, the steward* PARMENO *arrives from the market accompanied by a cook and slaves with provisions for the wedding. At sight of* PARMENO, DEMEAS *resolves to extract the truth from him.*)

But see, here's Parmeno back from the market just in the nick of time. I'd better let him and the men get by.

(*He steps aside. Meanwhile* PARMENO *addresses the cook.*)

PARMENO

Cook, I'm damned if I know why you carry knives with you. Your chatter would reduce anything to mincemeat.

COOK

Are you trying to be funny with me, you ignoramus?

PARMENO

I?

COOK

It looks so to me, by heaven. If I inquire how many tables you are going to set, how many women there are, what time you want dinner served, whether I need to engage a butler, whether you've enough crockery in the house, whether the bakehouse has a roof, whether everything else is available . . .

PARMENO

You are reducing me to mincemeat, my dear fellow, in case you didn't know it, and your technique is perfect.

COOK

Go to the devil.

PARMENO

The same to you by all means. Just get in with you.
(*As the* COOK *and the servants disappear,* DEMEAS *steps out and calls.*)

DEMEAS

Parmeno!

PARMENO

Is someone calling *me?*

DEMEAS

Yes indeed, *you.*

PARMENO

God save you, master.

DEMEAS

Put away your basket and come to me here.

PARMENO (*entering with the basket*)

No bad luck, I hope.

DEMEAS (*alone*)

I imagine that fellow doesn't miss anything that goes on among the servants. He's a Paul Pry if anyone ever was. But he's at the door.

PARMENO (*as he emerges, to some one inside*)

Give the cook anything he wants, Chrysis, and keep the old woman away from the wine jars.

DEMEAS (*impatient*)

By the gods, will you . . .
(DEMEAS' *demeanour so frightens* PARMENO *that he becomes incapable of telling a straight story and increases* DEMEAS' *suspicion by his attempts at evasion.*)

PARMENO

What's to be done, master?

DEMEAS

What's to be done? Just step over here away from the door. A little further.

PARMENO

There.

DEMEAS

Now just you listen, Parmeno. I don't want to flog you, by the twelve gods, for a good many reasons.

PARMENO

Flog me? What have I done?

DEMEAS

You are helping to keep something a secret from me; so I have observed.

PARMENO

No, by Dionysus, no, by Apollo, not I! By Zeus, Saviour, by Asclepius!

DEMEAS

Stop! No more oaths.

PARMENO

Well, you're wrong, or may I never . . .

DEMEAS

Here you, look here.

PARMENO

Well?

DEMEAS

Speak. Whose baby is it?

PARMENO

Uh?

DEMEAS

I ask you whose baby it is.

PARMENO

Chrysis'.

DEMEAS

Who is the father?

PARMENO

You, master.

DEMEAS

That finishes you. You are trying to fool me.

PARMENO

I?

DEMEAS

Yes, I know all the details; I've been told. Moschion's the father; you're a party to it; and it's his doing that she is nursing it now herself.

PARMENO

Who says so?

DEMEAS

I saw her. Now just answer me this. Is this so?

PARMENO

It is, master; but the secret . . .

DEMEAS

What secret? Hey, men, give me a whip for this miscreant.

PARMENO

Don't, in heaven's name.

DEMEAS

I'll brand you.

PARMENO

You'll brand me?

DEMEAS

Yes, now.

PARMENO (*taking flight*)

I'm lost.

DEMEAS

Where are you off to, you carrion? Catch him.

(PARMENO *escapes and* DEMEAS' *worst suspicions are confirmed.*)

DEMEAS

O citadel of Cecrops' land! O far-flung sky! O . . . Why the outcry, Demeas? Why the outcry, fool! Restrain yourself. Endure. For Moschion is innocent of any fault. (*To the audience*) That's a strange thing to say perhaps, gentlemen, but it's the truth. For if he had done this thing wilfully, wrought upon by passion, or hating me, he would be guided by the same purpose now as then and would be up in arms against me. The truth is he has proved his innocence to me by his joyful reception of the proposed marriage. His eagerness wasn't due to love, as I guessed at the time, but to his desire to escape at last from my Helen there within. For she it is who is to blame for this. Evidently she caught him somewhere when he was fired with wine, when he wasn't master of himself. Strong

drink and youth often do such deeds, when they overcome a man—who may well have had no intention of injuring his neighbours. However I look at it, it's unreasonable that a boy who behaved with such propriety and restraint where others not connected with him were concerned, should have treated *me* like this, let him be adopted and not my son by birth ten times over. I'm not considering that, but his character.

But a vile, vile harlot, a consuming plague . . . But what's the use? That won't do any good, Demeas, you've got to play the man now. Forget your fondness, cease to love, and conceal to the utmost the unfortunate facts for your son's sake; as for the base Samian, thrust her out of doors head first to perdition. You've a pretext—because she kept the baby. Give her no other explanation, but grit your teeth and be firm. Show your breeding and stick to it.

(*As* DEMEAS *makes this resolve, the door of his house opens and the* COOK *emerges to see what can be keeping* PARMENO *so long.*)

COOK

Well, then, is he out here in front? Boy! Parmeno! (*Disgusted*) The fellow's given me the slip, why, before he'd lent a hand at all.

(DEMEAS *at once charges through the open door and proceeds to carry out his purpose. As he goes by he shouts at the* COOK.)

DEMEAS

Clear the way, you.

COOK (*peering breathlessly after him*)

Heracles, what's up? Boy! Some old lunatic has just burst into the house, or whatever is the matter? What do I see? Boy! By Posidon, the man's crazy, I believe; at any rate he's shrieking at the top of his voice. It would be very nice, wouldn't it, if my dishes lying right there in his way were to be smashed to flinders one and all. He's coming out. May you perish root and branch, Parmeno, for bringing me here! I'll step aside a bit.

(*At this minute the door opens and there come flying out* CHRYSIS, *nurse, and baby, pursued by the irate* DEMEAS, *who berates them.*)

DEMEAS

Don't you hear? Be off.

CHRYSIS (*bewildered*)

Where on earth am I to go, for pity's sake?

DEMEAS

To the devil, off with you!

CHRYSIS

O unkind fate!

(*She bursts into tears.*)

DEMEAS (*with bitter irony*)

Oh, yes, unkind fate! Very moving, tears, to be sure. I'll put an end. I fancy, to your . . .

(*He suddenly checks himself.*)

CHRYSIS

To my doing what?

DEMEAS

Nothing. You've got the baby and the old woman. Clear out at once.

CHRYSIS

Because I kept the baby and because . . . ?

DEMEAS

No "ands" at all. Because you kept the baby.

CHRYSIS

Is that all that's wrong? I don't understand.

DEMEAS

You didn't know how to live in luxury.

CHRYSIS

I didn't know how? What do you mean?

DEMEAS

Yet you came to me with nothing but the dress you had on, mind you, Chrysis, and a very plain one too.

CHRYSIS

What of it?

DEMEAS

It was I you thought the world of in those days, when you weren't doing so well.

CHRYSIS

And who is it now?

DEMEAS

No more of this. You have everything of yours. I'm giving you servants besides, see? Leave the house, Chrysis.

COOK

It's a fit of temper. I must go to him. Oh, sir, reflect.

DEMEAS

What have you to say?

COOK

Don't bite me!

(*He retires.*)

DEMEAS

Well, some other woman will put up with what I have to offer, Chrysis, from now on, and thank the gods too.

CHRYSIS

What's the matter?

DEMEAS

Why, you've got a son, that's all.

COOK

He's not biting yet. (*To* DEMEAS.) Even so . . .

DEMEAS (*to the* COOK)

I'll smash your head, you fellow, if you give me any more of your talk.

COOK

Well, you've the right; but look, I'm going in now.

(*Exit.*)

DEMEAS (*resorting to sarcasm*)

The great lady! Now you'll discover in the city just who you are. Lady-loves like you, Chrysis, make a bare ten shillings, running about to dinners and drinking strong drink until they die—or until they go hungry, if they don't die promptly and speedily. Nobody will know what it is like any better than you will, I fancy, and you'll find out just what you amounted to when you made your mistake. (CHRYSIS *approaches.*) Stay where you are.

(*He slams the door in her face.*)

CHRYSIS

Oh, what an unlucky girl I am!

(*She weeps bitterly.*)

(*At this point* NICERATUS *appears on the scene escorting from the market a skinny old sheep as his contribution to his daughter's wedding.*)

NICERATUS

When this sheep is sacrificed, the gods and goddesses will get their due. It has blood, bile enough, fine bones, a big spleen, just what the Olympians require. And I'll make hash of the fleece and send it to my friends for a taste, since that's all that's left for me. (*The sheep is taken into* NICERATUS' *house and he spies* CHRYSIS.) But, Heracles, what's this? Here's Chrysis standing in front of the house in tears. Verily it's no other. Whatever has happened?

CHRYSIS

I've been shown the door by your good-natured friend. Just that.

NICERATUS

O Heracles! Who? Demeas?

CHRYSIS

Yes.

NICERATUS

What for?

CHRYSIS

On account of the baby.

NICERATUS

The women told me that you had gone crazy and were keeping a baby that you had let live. But he's mild as mild.

CHRYSIS

He wasn't angry at once, only afterward, just now. And he had told me to get everything in the house ready for the wedding, and then in the midst of it in he rushed from outside like a madman and now he's shut the door in my face.

NICERATUS

Demeas? Is he mad?

At this point there is a considerable gap in our text

Niceratus evidently offers Chrysis a refuge in his house. His wife and daughter would be glad to welcome the baby, who, it will be remembered, was really Plangon's son by Moschion. We can only guess how Demeas learned that Plangon, not Chrysis, was the babe's mother. Probably he met Moschion, who, having heard of the expulsion of Chrysis, would betray anxiety for the infant's fate and

by trying to calm his father would further provoke him. Demeas would at length, in spite of his resolutions, give vent to his indignation in such a storm of fury that Moschion, alarmed, would be glad to acquaint him with the true story and make his escape. Demeas, overcome with joy at finding his suspicions groundless, so that he may make friends once more with his mistress, is inclined to take a cheerful view of life and plans to celebrate the wedding of Plangon and Moschion with more zest than ever. In this hilarious mood he accosts Niceratus and makes the mistake of appealing to that irascible man's non-existent sense of humour. Niceratus learns that Chrysis is forgiven because the baby she was cherishing was really Plangon's and that the joke is now on him, since it is his daughter who is responsible for the superfluous infant. Imagine the feelings of the proud and impecunious Niceratus at the prospect of having permanently on his hands not only an unwed daughter but a fatherless grandson to boot. Naturally violent as he is, his fury is on this occasion unrestrained. When Demeas proceeds to hint at Moschion's connection with the affair, Niceratus misunderstands his embarrassment and assumes that he intends to break off the match. He rushes off.

DEMEAS

But come back and . . . What shall I say? Wait a bit, sir.

NICERATUS

I'm off. It's all over. All the arrangements are upset.

(*He tears into his house in a rage.*)

DEMEAS

By Zeus, my friend here will be angry at what he has heard. He'll roar. The fellow's rough and brutal; he doesn't care anything for anyone. But that I should suspect such things! Beast that I am, I ought . . . By Hephaestus, I don't deserve to live. (*Angry words are heard from within.*) Heracles, how loud he shouts! That's it, he is calling for fire. He says he'll burn the baby. What now! I shall see my grandson burnt alive before my eyes! There, he's coming out. He's a tornado or a thunderbolt, not a man.

NICERATUS (*rushing out*)

Demeas, Chrysis is taking sides against me and behaving most outrageously.

DEMEAS

How's that?

NICERATUS

She's persuaded my wife to admit nothing at all, nor the girl either. She's keeping the baby in spite of me and refuses to give it up. So don't be surprised if I murder the woman herself.

DEMEAS

Murder?

NICERATUS

Yes, since she's a party to it all.

DEMEAS

Oh, never do that, Niceratus.

NICERATUS

I wanted to warn you.

(*He rushes in again.*)

DEMEAS (*left cowering*)

He's a raving maniac. There he goes flying in. How am I to deal with this terrible situation? I know I never ran into such a row before. It's certainly much the best to make a plain statement of the facts. Why, heavens! The door's banging again.

(*This time* CHRYSIS *comes flying out, still holding the infant, the murderous* NICERATUS *in hot pursuit with upraised stick.*)

CHRYSIS

Heaven help me! What shall I do? Where shall I go for refuge? He'll get the baby from me.

DEMEAS (*at his own doorway*)

Chrysis, here!

CHRYSIS

Who's there?

DEMEAS

Run inside.

(CHRYSIS *gets behind him.*)

NICERATUS

Where are you going? Where are you off to?

DEMEAS

Jove, I've a prize-fight on my hands to-day, it seems. (*He intercepts* NICERATUS.) What do you want? What person are you after?

NICERATUS

Demeas, get out of my way. Let me get possession of the child and then hear what the women have to say about the matter.

DEMEAS

He's mad. What, are you going to strike me?

NICERATUS

Indeed I am.

DEMEAS (*to* CHRYSIS)

Scoot in, you. (*To* NICERATUS.) But I swear I'll strike too. (*They struggle.*) Run, Chrysis, he's too much for me.

(CHRYSIS *gets safely in with the child. As* NICERATUS *follows in hot pursuit,* DEMEAS *seizes him.*)

NICERATUS

You're the assailant now. I protest.

DEMEAS

But you have a stick to beat a free-woman and are in pursuit of her.

NICERATUS

That's a quibble.

DEMEAS

So was your protest too.

NICERATUS

She refused to give me the baby.

DEMEAS (*incriminating himself to get an opening for explanations*)

What an idea, my own offspring!

NICERATUS (*incredulous and threatening*)

But it's not yours!

DEMEAS (*alarmed*)

Wait a bit. Help, help!

NICERATUS (*turning towards* DEMEAS' *house*)

Go on shouting. I'll go in and murder the woman.

DEMEAS

What's to be done? Here's more trouble. I won't let him. (*Returns to the battle.*) Where are you going? Do wait.

NICERATUS

Don't you lay a hand on me.

DEMEAS

Do control yourself.

NICERATUS

You've wronged me somehow, Demeas. You show it, and you know all about the affair.

DEMEAS

Then ask *me* about it and don't bother the women.

NICERATUS

Has your son made a fool of me?

DEMEAS

Nonsense. He'll marry the girl. But that isn't it. Just take a stroll with me here—just for a little.

NICERATUS

Stroll?

DEMEAS

And recover your self-possession. (*They stroll.*) Didn't you ever hear them tell at the play how Zeus turned to gold and leaked through a roof and seduced a girl imprisoned there in days gone by?

NICERATUS

Pray tell me what has that to do with it?

DEMEAS

Possibly one must be prepared for anything. Take a look and see whether your roof leaks anywhere.

NICERATUS

It's mostly leaks. But what has that got to do with it?

DEMEAS

Sometimes Zeus turns to gold, sometimes to water. You see? It's his doing. How quick we were to discover it!

NICERATUS

And you are taking me for a booby.

DEMEAS

By Apollo, no, I'm not. Why, surely you're not a whit less noble than Acrisius. If Zeus condescended in his case, your daughter surely . . .

NICERATUS

Alas! alas! Moschion has played me this trick.

DEMEAS

He'll marry her, never fear. But this thing, I'm quite certain, is an act of God. I can name you thousands walking about in our midst who are of divine parentage, but you think something terrible has occurred. In the first place there's Chaerephon, the fellow that gets his dinners gratis; doesn't he look like a god to you?

NICERATUS

He does look like one. What's the use? I won't fight you when it can't do any good.

DEMEAS

That's a sensible man, Niceratus. Androcles lives all these years, runs, jumps, makes a lot of money, walks about with a swarthy face. He couldn't die a paleface, even if you were to cut his throat. Isn't he a god? Just pray for a blessing on it. Burn some incense. My son will come for your daughter directly. *Must* we make a long story of it—for you're a man of sense. Suppose he *was* caught speeding then; won't *you* be speedy now?

NICERATUS

I'll get things ready in the house.

DEMEAS

We've a lead that you must overtake. You're worldly wise. (*He means that the baby has got ahead of the wedding, which must now be speeded up to catch it. Then to himself*) I'm very grateful to all the gods to find that there's no truth in what I believed just now.

(*Here the act ends. Between the acts the spectators are entertained by the usual troupe of revellers. At the beginning of the next act* MOSCHION *comes on the scene. He has been brooding on the enormity of his father's suspicions and feels very ill-used.*)

MOSCHION

Just now when with great difficulty I got clear of the charge that was brought against me, I was content with that and asked for nothing better. As I get more self-possessed, however, and analyse the situation, I'm perfectly furious now. I'm exceedingly provoked to think what my father supposed me capable of doing. If it were all in order with the girl and there weren't so many obstacles—my oath, my fondness, the lapse of time, our intimacy—enforcing me to servitude, I'd certainly not be here when next he brings any such charge against me. Instead I'd relieve the city of my presence and dash off for some place in Bactria or Caria to pass the time

a-soldiering there. As a matter of fact, however, my beloved Plangon, I shall because of you do no deed of valour. 'Tis not permitted; love forbids, who rules just now as sovereign o'er my will. Still I mustn't let it pass altogether abjectly or mean-spiritedly. Rather I'll simply pretend, if nothing else, and frighten him by saying that I'm going to cut the cable. That will make him more careful hereafter not to be rude to me again, when he sees that I don't take it as a matter of course this time. (PARMENO *at this moment arrives on the scene, having gradually recovered his wits.*) But see, here's just the man I wanted most, turned up in the very nick of time.

PARMENO (*failing to notice* MOSCHION)

By Zeus most high, a stupid, miserable piece of work I've done! When I was quite innocent of any fault, I took fright and ran away from my master. What had I done to deserve that? Let's examine the charges plainly one by one like this. (*He counts on his fingers.*) The young master misdemeaned himself with a girl of free status. No fault of Parmeno's there surely. Pregnancy on her part. Parmeno not responsible. The baby came under our roof. He brought it, not I. Somebody in the house has admitted the fact. What of it? Where's any fault on Parmeno's part in that? There isn't any. Why then did you take to your heels like that, you numskull, you chicken-heart? Nonsense, a man threatens to brand me. He's mistaken, to be sure, but it doesn't make a difference of one iota whether you are branded justly or unjustly; any way it isn't nice.

MOSCHION (*accosting him*)

Here you.

PARMENO

Hello, sir.

MOSCHION

Leave that nonsense you're talking and go in at once.

PARMENO

What am I to do?

MOSCHION

Bring me a cloak and a sword of some sort.

PARMENO

Bring you a sword?

MOSCHION

Yes, and hurry.

PARMENO

What for?

MOSCHION

Get a move on, stop talking, and do what I tell you.

PARMENO

But what's up?

MOSCHION

If I take a strap . . .

PARMENO

No, no, no, I'm going all right.

MOSCHION

Why the delay then? (PARMENO *goes.*) My father will come to me now. Of course he'll entreat me to stay at home. And he'll entreat in vain for a while; that's required. Then, when I think the time has come, I'll yield. Only I must be plausible and that, by Dionysus, is just what I can't achieve. He's at the door, coming out.

(*It is, however, not* DEMEAS, *but* PARMENO *who appears.*)

PARMENO (*persuasively*)

You seem to be a long way behind the march of events here. What you know, what you've heard of the situation isn't at all exact, so you're all worked up about nothing. Give up your plans and come in now.

MOSCHION (*sternly*)

Haven't you got it?

PARMENO

No, they're celebrating your wedding. They're mixing the wine, while incense rises, and burnt offering ascends upon Hephaestus' flame.

MOSCHION

Here you, haven't you got it?

PARMENO

No! I tell you they've been waiting for you ever so long. Aren't you in a hurry to fetch the bride? Happiness is yours. You've no troubles. Cheer up. What do you want?

MOSCHION (*with all the wounded dignity of adolescence*)

Will you give me advice, say, you polluted thief of a slave?

(*Beats him.*)

PARMENO

What are you doing, Moschion?

MOSCHION

Will you run in at once and get what I tell you?

PARMENO (*plaintively*)

My lip's split.

MOSCHION

Still chattering, you?

PARMENO

I'm going. Zeus knows I am. But I've struck a peck of trouble.

MOSCHION

Won't you hurry?

PARMENO (*at the door*)

They're holding the wedding really.

MOSCHION

Go. Hurry. Bring me some news. (PARMENO *goes in.*) Now he'll come to me. However, gentlemen, if he doesn't beg me to stay at home, but loses his temper instead and lets me go—which didn't occur to me just now—what shall I do? Probably he won't do that, but if? For nothing is impossible. I *shall* look a fool, by Zeus, if I face about now.

(*Here the text ends. The stages seems to be set for* NICERATUS *and others to misunderstand* MOSCHION'S *delay in coming for the bride. How the final solution is brought about we can only guess. Very likely* CHRYSIS *is found to be* MOSCHION'S *sister and a citizen, so that she can be legally married to* DEMEAS. MOSCHION *must of course be united to* PLANGON.)

II
THE ARBITRATION

Characters in the Play

Syriscus, *a charcoal-burner*
Davus, *a goat-herd*
Smicrines, *an Athenian business man*
Onesimus, *slave of* Charisius
Habrotonon, *harp-girl of* Charisius
Pamphila, *daughter of* Smicrines *and wife of* Charisius
Charisius, *a young Athenian, son-in-law of* Smicrines
Sophrona, *the old nurse of* Pamphila
Chaerestratus, *neighbour of* Charisius
Simias, *a friend of* Charisius
Cario, *a cook*

INTRODUCTION

by L. A. Post

THE *Epitrepontes* or *Arbitration* is more fully preserved than the other plays of Menander. We have more than half of it in good condition and can follow the plot almost throughout. Furthermore, the parts that are best preserved are of the greatest interest; they are not the sort of clowning of which we have so much in the extant parts of the *Shearing of Glycera*. Menander's interest in the theme of love is well illustrated in the *Arbitration*. In fact it is almost a problem play; and, though it begins and ends with a note of comedy, the crisis of the play is thoroughly tragic. Since we have the merest scraps of the first act, we do not know whether the situation was explained in a prologue or not. The probabilities are that it was.

The principal characters of the play are Pamphila and Charisius. The latter is a young man who is devoted to philosophy and strict in his morals. In a modern drama he would be a rather priggish clergyman. In the play we see how love operates to broaden his sympathies, to teach him humility and to make a new man of him.

Charisius has a servant Onesimus, who apes his master's philosophy, but is only a slave after all. The master has generous impulses, but the slave is concerned only for his own hide. He has a great deal of curiosity and gets into trouble by his well-meant interference.

Pamphila was a young girl, brought up in seclusion, like all Athenian girls of means. About six months before our play opens she had been married to the man of her father's choice. She had come to love the upright Charisius and her patience wins for her in the end her husband's friendship and respect.

Smicrines, the father of Pamphila, is a shrewd man of business. He is crude and excitable. He has the practical man's contempt for sentiment. He had married his daughter to Charisius because he approved of the frugal habits of the latter. His alarm when Charisius suddenly becomes a spendthrift is excellent material for comedy.

Sophrona, Pamphila's old nurse, appears only in the final scene of the play. Chaerestratus and Simias are young men, friends of Charisius, who laugh at his serious ways and help him to drown his sorrows. CARIO, the cook, is the usual comic figure. Habrotonon is the harp-girl, a slave, whom Charisius hires as a companion.

The event that produces the complications of the drama had happened ten months before. Pamphila had been assaulted by a drunken youth at the all-night festival of the Tauropolia, in which women took part. Five months after her marriage to Charisius, she bore in his absence a son. Her nurse, Sophrona, helped her to conceal the fact and saw to it that the baby was exposed in the fields, either to die or to be rescued by some chance passer. The discovery that Charisius is himself the baby's father will of course provide a conventional solution of the problem of the play.

Charisius meanwhile would have known nothing of his wife's predicament except for the officious interference of Onesimus, who informed him of the fact. Charisius might have repudiated his wife, but chose instead to give her the opportunity to repudiate him. Her secret might thus be kept from her father and from the outside world. He embarked on a life of extravagant self-indulgence. He stayed away from home and spent money at a rate that was sure to lead Smicrines to take action. When the play opens, Charisius is staying at the house of Chaerestratus. The scene shows the two houses, that of Chaerestratus, where Charisius is entertaining his companions and the harp-girl, Habrotonon, and that of Charisius, where his wife, Pamphila, lives deserted.

To understand the plot, it should be noted that we have here a favourite theme of folklore, the outcast babe who, by fortune's favor, gains or regains a lofty status. Euripides treats it in his *Ion* and with a difference in his *Andromache*. There Molossus, whose story is the theme, has nevertheless no part in the action. So here the mute and helpless babe gains through Davus his life, through Syriscus his hope of freedom, through Habrotonon his status as Charisius' son, though a bastard, then through Pamphila his rightful place as symbol of a reunited family and cherished scion of a cultured citizen. When Smicrines capitulates, the babe's success can go no further. His story supplies the framework of the action and every scene is relevant to his advancement.

THE ARBITRATION

ACT I

OF THE first act of the play we possess very little. We can, however, guess at the general course of the action. There was probably a prologue which explained the facts that have already been mentioned. There was a good deal of jesting on the part of the cook. He is a loud-mouthed drunken railer. He knows all the back-stairs gossip of Athens and retails it boisterously with the embroidery of a crude imagination. He insists on knowing why Charisius, who has recently married, is away from home with the harp-girl Habrotonon, and Onesimus finds his companion's free and easy ways rather trying. He is too discreet to tell all he knows. Finally Chaerestratus comes from his house and orders the cook to go inside and prepare lunch. Onesimus also departs, but Chaerestratus remains to observe a new arrival. This is Smicrines, the father of Pamphila. He is as unattractive as she is charming. He is the strict old man, who has no patience with weakness or extravagance, and insists always on the letter of the bond. On the present occasion he is in a state of great excitement, because he has heard in the city of Charisius' extravagant expenditures on cooks and harp-girls. "Twelve drachmas a day to a slave dealer for a girl! Why, a man could live on that for a month and six days besides!" "Yes," says Chaerestratus in a sarcastic aside, "it would keep him alive on poor-house soup." Smicrines finally goes into Charisius' house to see what Pamphila has to say about her husband's conduct. Thereupon Chaerestratus retires into his own house to inform Charisius that his father-in-law has arrived and is likely to make trouble.

ACT II

At the beginning of the second act Smicrines reappears. Knowing nothing of Pamphila's baby, he is indignant at Charisius' behaviour and sees no justification for it. He is not quite sure what to do, but is determined to do something. He is about to set out for the city to ask

advice, when he is confronted with a strange situation. Two slaves, rudely clad in skins, are involved in a dispute. They come on the stage arguing. Syriscus, the charcoal-burner, is accompanied by his wife, who carries a baby. He is eloquently expostulating with the sullen Davus, a goat-herd, who maintains his case with equal heat.

SYRISCUS

You're afraid of a fair trial.

DAVUS

It's a put-up game of yours, curse you.

SYRISCUS

You've no right to keep what's not yours. We must get someone to arbitrate.

DAVUS

I'm willing; let's argue it out.

SYRISCUS

Who's to decide it?

DAVUS

Anyone will do for me. It serves me right though. Why did I give you anything?

SYRISCUS (*indicating* SMICRINES)

How about that man? Does he suit you as a judge?

DAVUS

Yes, good luck to it.

SYRISCUS (*to* SMICRINES)

If you please, sir, could you spare us a minute?

SMICRINES (*testily*)

You? What for?

SYRISCUS

We have a disagreement about something.

SMICRINES

Well, what's that to me?

SYRISCUS

We are looking for someone to decide it impartially. So if nothing prevents, do settle our dispute.

SMICRINES

Confound the rascals. Do you mean to say that you go about arguing cases, you fellows in goatskins?

SYRISCUS

Suppose we do. It won't take long and it's no trouble to understand the case. Grant the favour, sir. Don't be contemptuous, please. Justice should rule at every moment, everywhere. Whoever happens to come along should make this cause his own concern, for it's a common interest that touches all men's lives.

DAVUS (*alarmed at this burst of eloquence*)

I've got quite an orator on my hands. Why did I give him anything?

SMICRINES

Well, tell me. Will you abide by my decision?

SYRISCUS

Absolutely.

SMICRINES

I'll hear the case. Why shouldn't I? (*Turning to the sullen* DAVUS) You speak first, you that aren't saying anything.

DAVUS (*sure of his case but not very sure of his words, which come slowly enough to leave room for frequent pauses*)

I'll go back a bit first—not just my dealings with this fellow—so you'll understand the transaction. In the scrubland not far from here I was watching my flocks, sir, perhaps a month ago to-day, all by myself, when I found a baby left deserted there with a necklace and some such trinkets as these.

(*He shows some trinkets.*)

SYRISCUS

The dispute is about them.

DAVUS

He won't let me speak.

SMICRINES (*to* SYRISCUS)

If you interrupt, I'll take my stick to you.

DAVUS

And serve him right too.

SMICRINES

Go on.

DAVUS

I will. I picked it up and went back home with it and was going to raise it. That's what I intended then. In the night, though, like every one else, I thought it over to myself and argued it out: "Why should I bring up a baby and have all that trouble? Where am I to get all that money to spend? What do I want with all that worry?" That's the state I was in. Early next morning I was tending my flock again, when along came this fellow, he's a charcoal-burner, to this same spot to get out stumps there. He had made friends with me before that. So we got talking together and he saw that I was gloomy and said: "Why so thoughtful, Davus?" "Why indeed," said I, "I meddle with what doesn't concern me." So I tell him what had happened, how I found the baby and how I picked it up. And he broke in at once, before I had finished my story, and began entreating me: "As you hope for luck, Davus," he kept saying every other thing, "do give me the baby, as you hope for fortune, as you hope for freedom. I've a wife, you see," says he, "and she had a baby, but it died." Meaning this woman who is here now with the child. Did you entreat me, Syriscus?

SYRISCUS

I admit it.

DAVUS

He spent the whole day at it. Finally I yielded to his coaxing and teasing and promised him the child and he went off wishing me a million blessings. When he took it too, he kissed my hands. Didn't you?

SYRISCUS

Yes, I did.

DAVUS

He took himself off. Just now he and his wife happened on me and all of a sudden he claims the objects that I found with the child—it was some small matters, tomfoolery, nothing really—and says he's cheated because I don't consent and lay claim to them myself. I say, though, that he ought to be thankful for the share he did get by his entreaties. Though I don't give him all of it, that's no reason why I should have to stand examination. Even if he had found it while we were going about together and it had been a case of share-your-luck, why he would have got part and I the rest. But I was alone when I found it and you weren't even there and yet you think you ought to have all and I nothing.

To conclude, I have given you something of mine. If you are satisfied with it, you may still keep it; but if you aren't satisfied and have changed your mind, then give it back again to me and take neither more nor less than your due. But for you to have the whole business, part with my consent, the rest forced from me, is not fair. That's all I have to say.

SYRISCUS (*keeping a respectful eye on the stick*)
It that all?

SMICRINES
Didn't you hear what he said? He has finished.

SYRISCUS
(*His words come fast enough but his flights of eloquence have a tendency to sink unexpectedly. However, his quick turns and lively gestures supply any deficiencies and* DAVUS *is left stranded just where he thought himself most secure*)
Good. Then I'll take my turn. He was alone when he found the baby. He is right about everything that he has mentioned. The facts are as stated, sir. I dispute nothing. I got the child from him by entreating and imploring him. For his story is true.

Information came to me from a certain shepherd that he had been talking to, one of his fellow-workmen, to the effect that he had also found at the same time some trinkets. (*With a dramatic gesture toward the infant.*) To claim these has come, sir, in person, my client here. Give me the child, wife. (*Taking the baby from his wife's arms*) This infant claims from you his necklace and his tokens, Davus. He says that they were placed with him for his adornment, not for your bread and butter. I too support his claim, since I have been made his guardian. You made me so yourself, when you gave him to me. (*Appealing to* SMICRINES.) It is now your part, sir, it seems to me, to decide whether the trinkets, gold or whatever they are, are to be kept for the child as his mother, whoever she was, intended them, until he grows up, or whether the very man who robbed him is to keep another's property, just because he found it first. But why then didn't I claim them when I got the baby? Because I wasn't entitled yet to speak for him. Nor have I come now to claim anything for myself. Share your luck indeed! Never call it finding where there's a party wronged. Here is no find appropriated, but a fund misappropriated.

Think of this too, sir. Perhaps this babe is better born than we. He may, though brought up among labourers, look down on our condition, seek his own native level, have pluck to ply some noble occupation, hunt lions, bear arms, take part in races at the games. You have seen actors, I am sure, and all these things are familiar to you. A certain Neleus and Pelias, the famous ones, were found by an aged goat-herd clad in a goatskin just like mine. When he saw that they were nobler born than he, he told them all, how he found and picked them up, and he gave them a wallet full of tokens and from that they found out everything about themselves for certain and now became kings, who once were goat-herds. Yes, but if some Davus had stolen and sold these tokens to get twelve shillings for himself, they would have passed their lives in ignorance of their great and noble

birth. Surely, sir, it is not right for me to sustain his body, while Davus seizes and destroys his hope of preserving his identity. Men have been kept by means of tokens from marrying their sisters, have found and rescued a mother, have saved a brother's life. Life is full of pitfalls for us all, sir. We must use foresight to avoid them, must look a long way ahead to find the means.

But give him back, says he, if you're not satisfied. There he thinks he has something solid to fall back on. He's wrong. It's not right for you, when you are required to restore something that belongs to the child, to claim him as well to boot—so that you can do your thieving more undisturbed another time, now that chance has preserved something that belongs to him. I have finished. Give your decision, whatever you believe to be right.

SMICRINES

Why, it's easily decided. Everything that was left with the child belongs to him. That's my verdict.

DAVUS (*expectantly*)

Good. But the child?

SMICRINES

By Zeus, I'll not assign him to you, who have been trying to wrong him, but rather to the one who came to his aid and prosecuted you when you would have defrauded him.

SYRISCUS

Heaven bless you, sir.

DAVUS (*disappointed and furious*)

The verdict's scandalous, so help me Zeus. I alone found all of it and I've been stripped of all of it, and the man that didn't find anything has it. Am I to hand it over?

SMICRINES

Yes.

DAVUS

The verdict's scandalous, curse me if it isn't!

SYRISCUS

Hurry up with it.

DAVUS

Heracles, what treatment!

SYRISCUS

Undo your wallet, and let me see. That's where you carry it. (*Appealing to* SMICRINES *who is leaving.*) Wait a minute, please, to see that he hands it over.

DAVUS

Why did I ever let him judge the case?

SYRISCUS

Hand it over, you scum.

DAVUS

Disgraceful, the way I've been treated!

SMICRINES (*to* SYRISCUS)

Have you everything?

SYRISCUS

I really think so. Unless he swallowed something while I was pleading, when it was going against him.

DAVUS

I wouldn't have believed it.

(SMICRINES *departs.*)

SYRISCUS

Good-bye, sir. It's high time all judges were like that.

DAVUS

Heracles, what a skin game! There never was a more scandalous verdict.

SYRISCUS

You were a thief.

DAVUS

Thief yourself, see to it now that you keep them for him safe and sound. Don't you fear, I'll have my eye on you the whole time.

SYRISCUS

Clear out and be hanged. (DAVUS *goes.*) Now wife, take these things and carry them inside to the master. We'll wait here for Chaerestratus just now and set off for our work to-morrow when we have paid the rent. But first we must check these things off one at a time. Have you a box? Well, put them in your dress fold.

(*As* SYRISCUS *tells over the objects and tosses them to his wife,* ONESIMUS *comes from the house and squints at the sun to note the time. He is*

responsible for the entertainment provided by his master CHARISIUS *in the house of* CHAERESTRATUS.)

ONESIMUS

A slower cook was never seen. By this time yesterday they had been at the wine for a long while.

SYRISCUS (*examining the trinkets*)

This looks like a fowl or something and a very plump one too. Here is something set with stones. Here is a toy axe.

ONESIMUS (*true to his ruling passion*)

What's this?

SYRISCUS

Here is an iron ring with gold trimmings. The seal is a bull or a goat, I can't tell which, done by Cleostratus, it says.

ONESIMUS (*recognizing the ring*)

Here, let me see it.

SYRISCUS (*handing him the ring*)

There. But who are *you?*

ONESIMUS

The very same.

SYRISCUS

Who's the same?

ONESIMUS

The ring.

SYRISCUS

What ring? I don't understand

ONESIMUS

My master Charisius'.

SYRISCUS

You're crazy.

ONESIMUS

He lost it.

SYRISCUS

Put down the ring, plague take you.

ONESIMUS

Put down our ring for you? How came it to be in your possession?

SYRISCUS

O Apollo and the gods, what a frightful plague! What a job it is to protect an orphan's property! Every one who comes up is suddenly all agog for plunder. Put down the ring, I say.

ONESIMUS

Are you trying to be funny with me? It belongs to the master, by Apollo and the gods.

SYRISCUS

Without a doubt I'd sooner have my throat cut than sacrifice anything to him. It's settled. I'll go to law with them all one after another. They're the babe's, not mine. Here is a necklace or something. Take it, wife. And a bit of red cloth. Go on in. (*To* ONESIMUS.) Now what have you to say?

ONESIMUS

I? This belongs to Charisius. He lost it once when he had been drinking, so he said.

SYRISCUS

Well, Chaerestratus is my master. Either keep it safe or give it back to me, so that I may produce it intact for you.

ONESIMUS

I prefer to look after it myself.

SYRISCUS

It makes no difference to me either way, for I believe we both turn in here at the same house. (*Both turn to enter* CHAERESTRATUS' *house where* CHARISIUS *is temporarily established with his party.*)

ONESIMUS

Just now, though, the party is under way, and it isn't perhaps a good time to tell him about it. But to-morrow I will.

SYRISCUS

I'll wait for you and to-morrow I'll be ready to leave the decision to anyone you please. I've not come off badly this time either, but apparently I've got to neglect everything else and devote my time to lawsuits. That's the only way to keep things nowadays.

(*They go in and a chorus of revellers enter and entertain the audience.*)

ACT III

(ONESIMUS *comes from the house in great perplexity and soliloquizes.*)

ONESIMUS

AT LEAST half a dozen times I've started to go to the master and show him the ring. I get up close to him, right by his side, and then duck. In fact I'm sorry for what I told him the last time. (*Thoughtfully.*) You see he keeps saying pretty frequently: 'Perdition take the rascal that told me of this.' Really I'm afraid he'll come to terms with his wife, then take me and put me out of the way, because I told him her secret and because I have knowledge of it. It's just as well that I refrained from adding another complication. This too might get me into pretty hot water.

(*Here he is interrupted by sounds of a struggle.* CHARISIUS' *harp-girl,* HABROTONON, *is trying to escape from the importunities of his guests, who have noticed how little attention she gets from their host. She finally breaks away.*)

HABROTONON

Let me go, please, and don't bother me. Apparently I've been unintentionally making a fool of my unfortunate self. I thought I had a lover, but the fellow's hatred for me is something diabolical. He has got so now that he won't even let me, mercy on us, have a place at the same table with him, but puts me at a distance.

ONESIMUS (*to himself*)

Then shall I give it back to the man I just had it of? Nonsense.

HABROTONON (*puzzled as she reflects on* CHARISIUS' *strange conduct*)

My goodness, what ails the man to throw away all that money? As far as he is concerned I'm qualified to carry the basket for the goddess, for pity's sake. Holy and pure from marriage rites, as they say, I've sat since day before yesterday.

ONESIMUS (*wondering what excuse he is to make to* SYRISCUS)

But then how, ye gods, how, I entreat you . . .

(*At this moment* SYRISCUS *comes from the house in search of* ONESIMUS, *whom he suspects of appropriating the ring under false pretences.*)

SYRISCUS

Where can he be? I've looked for him everywhere inside. Here you. Give me back the ring, my friend, or show it to the man you're finally going to. Let's get the case settled. I've to go somewhere.

ONESIMUS (*embarrassed, but superior*)

This is the way it is, fellow. This ring really does belong to my master Charisius, I'm absolutely certain of that, but I'm afraid to bring it to his attention. It just about means making him father of the child it was found with, if I deliver it to him.

SYRISCUS

How's that, you simpleton?

ONESIMUS

He lost it one time at the Tauropolia when there was a night celebration with women taking part. The natural inference is that he assaulted a girl; she had a baby and of course abandoned it, the one in question. Now if the girl could be found first, then one might produce the ring and it would be definite evidence of something. Otherwise it means suspicion and disturbance.

SYRISCUS (*still suspicious*)

Just look to that yourself. But if you're trying to frighten me off, meaning me to take back the ring and give you a little present, you're out of your head. I'm not the man to compromise.

ONESIMUS

I don't ask you to either.

SYRISCUS

I'll be back when I have done an errand, for I'm going to town just now. I'll see then what's to be done about it.

(*As* SYRISCUS *leaves,* HABROTONON *approaches* ONESIMUS. *It has occurred to her that she may still win* CHARISIUS' *favour by a new method.*)

HABROTONON

Is it the baby that the woman is nursing now inside that this charcoal-burner found?

ONESIMUS

So he says.

HABROTONON

Isn't that great! For pity's sake!

ONESIMUS

And with it was this ring of my master's.

HABROTONON (*impressively indignant*)

Oh! you wretch! If he really is your young master, and you look on and see him brought up as a slave, wouldn't you deserve to be put to death?

ONESIMUS (*surrounded by pitfalls*)

But there's this to be said, no one knows who his mother is.

HABROTONON

But he lost it, you say, at the Tauropolia?

ONESIMUS

Yes, when he was carousing, so the boy that attended him said.

HABROTONON

Evidently he attacked the women who were celebrating the revels by themselves. In fact I was there when just such a thing occurred.

ONESIMUS

You were there?

HABROTONON

Yes, last year at the Tauropolia. I was playing the lute for some young ladies and she was with them. I wasn't a performer myself, for at that time I hadn't—I mean I didn't yet know what a man is. (ONESIMUS *smiles knowingly*.) Indeed I didn't, by Aphrodite.

ONESIMUS

Yes, but do you know who the girl was?

HABROTONON

I could ask. She was a friend of the women that I was with.

ONESIMUS

Did you hear who her father was?

HABROTONON

I don't know anything about her except that I should recognize her if I saw her. A good-looking girl, goodness, yes, and rich too, they said

ONESIMUS

Perhaps it's the same one.

HABROTONON

I don't know about that. Well, while she was with us there, she strayed off and then suddenly comes running up alone, crying and tearing her hair. She had utterly ruined a very fine Tarantine shawl, and delicate, my goodness Why, it was all in tatters.

ONESIMUS

And she had this ring?

HABROTONON

Perhaps she did, but she didn't show it to me. I'm going to stick to the truth, you see.

ONESIMUS

What am I to do now?

HABROTONON

You look to that. But, if you're sensible and take my advice, you'll let your master know of this. If the child's mother is free born, why shouldn't he know of what's occurred?

ONESIMUS

Let's find out first who she is, Habrotonon. Will you help me to do that now?

HABROTONON

I really can't until I am sure who the man in question is. I'm afraid I might give information to the ladies I spoke of with no result. For all anyone knows someone else may have lost it after receiving the ring from him as a pledge. Perhaps he was dicing and gave it as security for an agreement, or he bound himself to something, found himself in a tight place and handed over the ring. Any number of other things of the sort regularly happen at drinking-bouts. Until I know the man responsible I'll neither look for her nor report anything of the sort.

ONESIMUS

Indeed you're quite right. What is to be done, though?

HABROTONON

See here, Onesimus. See if you approve of my idea. I'll pretend it all happened to me. I'll take this ring and go in to him.

ONESIMUS

Go on and explain, I see it at once.

HABROTONON

When he notices that I have the ring he'll ask me where I got it. I'll say: "At the Tauropolia when I was still a maid," taking on myself all that happened to her. Most of it I know.

ONESIMUS

Magnificent!

HABROTONON

If the escapade comes home to him, he'll immediately dash straight into the trap. He's been drinking and he'll tell everything first without stopping to think. Whatever he says I'll agree to, for safety's sake mentioning nothing before he does.

ONESIMUS

Superfine, by Helius!

HABROTONON

I'll be cunning and use vague language, to keep from going wrong, like: "How reckless you were, what a savage!"

ONESIMUS

Fine!

HABROTONON

"How roughly you handled me and the clothes you ruined, alas!" I'll say. But first I want to go inside and get the baby, cry over and hug him and ask the woman where she got him.

ONESIMUS

Lord save us! (*His fears are aroused by a certain touch of genius in* HABROTONON'S *technique.*)

HABROTONON

And to cap it all I'll say: "So now, take note, you've a baby born," and I'll produce our foundling here.

ONESIMUS

There's brass and trickiness, Habrotonon!

HABROTONON

And if this test works and he proves to be the child's father, we'll look for the girl at our leisure.

ONESIMUS

You don't mention the fact that you'll get your freedom. For as soon as he supposes you to be the child's mother, he'll obviously buy your liberty at once.

HABROTONON

I don't know. I hope so.

ONESIMUS

So you don't know? But, Habrotonon, do I get any thanks for my part?

HABROTONON

Goodness, yes! I shall consider you responsible for everything I get.

ONESIMUS

But if after that you purposely forget to look for the mother and play me false, how about that?

HABROTONON

For pity's sake, why do you think I want children? Liberty is all I pray for. (*Fervently.*) Ye gods, may that be my reward for what I'm doing.

ONESIMUS

I hope it will be.

HABROTONON

So you approve?

ONESIMUS

I approve most heartily, for if you play any tricks, I'll attack you then. There'll be a way. For the present, though, let's see if it's so.

HABROTONON (*looking pointedly at the ring*)

So you agree?

ONESIMUS (*loath to relinquish the ring*)

By all means.

HABROTONON

Go ahead and give me my ring.

ONESIMUS

Go ahead and take it.

HABROTONON (*as she receives the ring*)

Dear Lady *Eloquence,* be with me to help and give the words I speak success.

(*She goes in to play her part while* ONESIMUS *soliloquizes.*)

ONESIMUS

Intuitional, the female. When she sees that love won't lead her to liberty, and that she's not getting anywhere that way, she takes the other route. As for me, though, I shall be a slave all my days, moonstruck driveller that I am with no foresight at all about such things. But perhaps I shall get something from her if she has any luck. In fact I deserve to . . . How I waste my time counting on anything! I think I'm possessed, expecting gratitude from a woman! I only hope I shan't be worse off than I

am. My mistress' case is pretty shaky now, for it only needs the discovery of a girl of citizen birth as mother of this baby to make him take her. Citizen or not, this one's bound to separate in any case and this time I think I've rather neatly avoided the charge that I have a finger in the pie. I've sworn off being too helpful. If anyone discovers that I haven't minded my own business or haven't held my tongue about anything another time, he may take my teeth and pull them. [*Clenched teeth are a symbol of obstinate silence in Greek.*] (*He sees* SMICRINES *approaching from the city.*) But who's this coming? Smicrines, coming back from town all excited again. Perhaps he has learned the truth from someone. I'll take myself off out of his way to avoid trouble.

Onesimus retires to the house as Smicrines appears and delivers a tirade of which we can guess the drift. Just enough of the manuscript is preserved to indicate the development of the plot. Here and there a brief phrase can be reconstructed. Smicrines has accumulated in town further evidence of his son-in-law's extravagance. As he puts it, "The whole city buzzes with the scandal." He knows for how many days Charisius has been living with the harp-girl, how much he spends on cooks, guesses that he gambles, and is so thoroughly alarmed for his ducats and his daughter that he is resolved to rescue them both from Charisius' hands without delay. He soon has new evidence of Charisius' misdeeds.

For Habrotonon has been playing her part within so successfully that Charisius has acknowledged as his the baby with which she confronted him. The resulting confusion completely breaks up the party. The cook emerges with his slaves and outfit, leaving the house in high dudgeon because of the interruption which has spoiled the feast that he was providing. He is violently berating the household as he leaves. "A high time they're having with their lunch," comments Smicrines, and the cook continues: "Bad luck for me, bad luck and plenty of it. This time I've been caught somehow off my guard, but if ever again you happen to want a cook, you may go to the devil." Smicrines questions the cook and gets a good deal more than the truth. He hears not only that Charisius has a son by Habrotonon, but that he intends to purchase her freedom at a ruinous cost and keep her in violation of the terms of his marriage contract, which no doubt forbade him to raise children except Pamphila's or to establish another woman as her rival. The cook departs hastily, as Simias and other guests come from the house. They comment freely on Charisius' predicament. The comrade who had been so high and mighty about self-indulgence was now involved in a public scandal. Smicrines accosts them and gets confirmation of what the cook had

told him. "But perhaps," he says, "I'm being indiscreet and meddling where I'm not concerned, since apparently I have grounds for taking my daughter and leaving. I'll do just that. I've practically made up my mind. I call you to witness that my daughter's rights have been infringed." Simias and Chaerestratus fail to mollify the old man. When someone asserts that Charisius hates the so-called life of pleasure, Smicrines retorts with a list of his recent outings, and expresses indignation at his treatment of his connections by marriage, to whom doubtless he had originally been recommended by his frugality. "This Sir Touch-me-not won't have everything his own way. He *will* waste his substance in a tavern, will he, live with the beauty that he's adopting into the household, while he completely cuts the acquaintance of his legal wife and her father?" No, no, Smicrines will see to that. Here the act ends.

ACT IV

AT THE beginning of the fourth act Smicrines is talking to Pamphila, whom he has summoned from the house in order to take her away. He is astounded to find that she does not at once agree to leave her husband when she hears how he is behaving. We have two or three scraps of the long argument that ensued between them. Pamphila remonstrates in ladylike tones: "Necessary for my own good perhaps, but that's what you must make me see. Otherwise you'd be, not a father dealing with his daughter, but a master with his slave." Smicrines retorts: "Is there room here for argument and demonstration? Isn't it as plain as day? The case cries to heaven, Pamphila. If, however, you insist on my explaining, I'm prepared. I will put before you three possibilities. He'd be ruined for evermore and so would you." He then points out how impossible she would find the situation, if she were to attempt to live in the house with Charisius, supposing him to bring home a mistress and her child. "It's hard," he said, "Pamphila, for a free woman to hold her own against a bought mistress, who schemes more, knows more, has no shame, humours the man better." Neither can Charisius afford to keep up two households. "Look at the expense. Double for Thesmophoria and Scirophoria. Realize how ruinous it will be for his capital. Mustn't we agree that his case is desperate? Consider your position again. He says he has to go off to the Piraeus. He'll go there and stay a while. You'll be miserable about it, I'm sure. You'll wait a long while without your dinner, while he of course is drinking with his mistress." The third possibility, that Charisius might spend all his

time with the harp-girl and desert Pamphila altogether, must have been presented by Smicrines in even darker colours.

Pamphila, however, held her own against her father's eloquence and even against the despair in her own heart. When he pointed out her distress she agreed: "Indeed my eyes are all swollen with weeping." But marriage was for her a life-partnership. No matter how much she might suffer, no matter to what straits she might be brought, she would not of her own accord leave her husband. Charisius meanwhile was listening to this conversation. His feelings are described later. The effect on Smicrines of his daughter's determination to face ruin and misery rather than forsake her husband can be imagined. He goes off in a towering rage resolved to return with assistance and remove his daughter by force. Pamphila is left alone. She is desperately unhappy and sees no hope for herself, now that she has a rival, who has presented Charisius with a son. As she stands dejected by her door, the supposed rival, Habrotonon, comes out with the baby, still playing the part of anxious mother. Pamphila naturally desires at first to avoid the woman, not guessing with what dramatic suddenness her sorrow is to be turned to joy.

HABROTONON (*coming out*)

I am going out with him. He's been wailing, my goodness, ever so long. There's something wrong with my baby.

PAMPHILA (*seeing her rival*)

Will no god take pity on me in my misery?

HABROTONON

Darling baby, when will you see your mother? (*Noticing* PAMPHILA.) But who is this next door?

PAMPHILA

I will go.

HABROTONON (*recognizing her*)

Wait a minute, ma'am.

PAMPHILA

Are you speaking to me?

HABROTONON

Yes. Look and see if you recognize me. (*As* PAMPHILA *turns,* HABROTONON *scans her face.*) She's the very one I saw. How do you do, my dear?

PAMPHILA

But who are you?

HABROTONON

Just give me your hand. Tell me, my dear, didn't you attend a celebration for girls at last year's Tauropolia?

(*But* PAMPHILA'S *eye is caught by the trinkets that the babe is wearing. She exclaims at the sight.*)

PAMPHILA

Woman, where, tell me, did you get that child?

HABROTONON

Do you see something you recognize that he's wearing? Have no fear of me, ma'am.

PAMPHILA

Isn't he your own?

HABROTONON

I pretended he was, not to wrong his real mother, but to find her when I had time. And now I have found her, for you are the one I saw that other time.

PAMPHILA

But who is his father?

HABROTONON

Charisius.

PAMPHILA

Are you certain, my dear?

HABROTONON

Indeed I am. But aren't you the young wife that lives here?

PAMPHILA

Yes indeed.

HABROTONON

Happy woman, some god has taken pity on you. But someone is coming out next door. I heard a noise. Take me in with you, so that I can go on and tell you all the rest of the story just as it happened.

(*While* HABROTONON *is giving the overjoyed* PAMPHILA *a full account of the adventures of the baby that had brought sorrow but was now bringing greater joy, we learn of the crisis* CHARISIUS *has passed through. He had by chance overheard* PAMPHILA'S *conversation with her father. As she steadfastly refused to let anything induce her to desert her husband, not even his disloyalty to her,* CHARISIUS, *long*

torn between love and pride, had been completely humbled. ONESIMUS, *eavesdropping as usual, grew more and more alarmed as he saw* CHARISIUS *become furious with rage, rage against himself and against anyone who might seem to have injured the gentle* PAMPHILA. *Not feeling safe in the same house with his master,* ONESIMUS *slips out and gives vent to his feelings.*)

ONESIMUS

He's not quite sane. By Apollo, he's mad. He's really gone mad. By the gods he *is* mad. My master I mean, Charisius. He's had an atrabilious stroke or some such thing. How else can you explain it? He spent a long time by the door inside just now craning his neck and listening. His wife's father was having a talk with her about the business, I suppose. The way he kept changing colour, gentlemen, I don't care even to mention. Then he cried out: 'Oh darling! what a wonderful thing to say!' and beat his head violently. Then again after a while: 'What a wife I had and now have lost, alas!' And to cap it all, when he had heard them to the end and had gone in at last, inside there was groaning, tearing of hair, continual frenzy. Over and over again he'd repeat: 'Criminal that I am, when I had myself done a thing like that, when I had myself got an illegitimate child, to be so unfeeling, so utterly unforgiving to her in the same unhappy situation. No humanity; no mercy.' He calls himself names as hard as he can, his eyes are bloodshot with fury. I'm shaking in my shoes; I'm all wilted with terror. If he catches sight of me, who told on her, anywhere, while he's in this state, he'll maybe kill me. That's why I've quietly slipped out here. Where am I to turn though? What can I think of? It's all over. I'm done for. He's at the door coming out. O Zeus Saviour, help me if you can. (*As* ONESIMUS *hides,* CHARISIUS *comes out in a state of complete abasement and soliloquizes.*)

CHARISIUS

Oh, wasn't I a paragon, thinking always of my reputation, trying to discover what honour and dishonour really are, without spot or flaw in my own life! Heaven has used me well, just as I deserve. Precisely there I showed that I was only human. You poor, poor fool, swollen with conceit and loud in your preaching, intolerant of your wife's misfortune that she couldn't help, I will exhibit the same fault in you yourself, and then she will treat you gently, though you are bringing shame on her. You shall be revealed as having neither luck, nor skill, nor heart. How different from your intentions at that minute were her words to her father: 'She had come to her husband to share his life, she had no right to run away from the misfortune that had come.' But you with your mighty superiority are behaving like a savage. Where is your wisdom now? What will happen to her if you go on? Her father is going to show no considera-

tion for her. What care I for her father? I'll tell him plainly: 'You stop making trouble, Smicrines. My wife is not going to leave me. What do you mean by upsetting and brow-beating Pamphila?'

(*No sooner has* CHARISIUS *made up his mind to make his wife's cause his own than he reaps his just reward, for* HABROTONON *comes to bring him the good news about the baby. Naturally she is not a welcome sight to* CHARISIUS, *who almost at the same moment espies the unlucky* ONESIMUS. *In vain* ONESIMUS *affirms his innocence of eavesdropping.* HABROTONON *confesses that she is not after all the mother of* CHARISIUS' *child. Still more furious at the thought of the fraud that has been practised on him,* CHARISIUS *drives the abject* ONESIMUS *to throw all the blame on* HABROTONON, *who at last makes* CHARISIUS *listen.*)

HABROTONON

Stop attacking us, you foolish man. The child is your own lawful wife's, no other.

CHARISIUS

Would he were!

HABROTONON

By Demeter I swear it.

CHARISIUS

What sort of a story is that?

HABROTONON

Absolutely true.

CHARISIUS

Is the child really Pamphila's? It was mine before.

HABROTONON

And yours as well, to be sure.

CHARISIUS

Pamphila's! Habrotonon, I beg you, you mustn't excite me!

(*The fourth act ends when* CHARISIUS *is finally convinced and goes to* PAMPHILA. *Husband and wife are reunited.*)

ACT V

THE fifth act rounds out the story. Unfortunately we cannot be certain what happened to Habrotonon. Of course she gets her free-

dom. So in all probability does Onesimus. Simias and Chaerestratus are involved in the explanations, but we do not know just how their relations with Charisius and Habrotonon had been complicated by her temporary appearance in the rôle of mother of his son. At any rate all is set right. Habrotonon is complimented on her wit and courage and is perhaps placed in charge of Simias, who remarks, as the stage is cleared: "A girl like this couldn't have escaped his attentions (*i.e.* 'Chaerestratus'), but I will treat her with respect."

Smicrines remains to be dealt with. At this moment he reappears, equipped to abduct Pamphila and dragging Sophrona with him. She is Pamphila's old nurse, who had assisted her with the baby. She had been sent to meet him and to mollify him, but he is too headstrong to listen. The only result is to provoke him further. Since his excitement has been rendered meaningless by the course of events, he is an excellent subject for ridicule.

SMICRINES (*berating and shaking* SOPHRONA)

If I don't smash your head, Sophrona, I hope to be hanged. You'll admonish me too, will you? I'm too hasty about carrying off my daughter, you cursed hag? Am I to wait for her good husband to consume my dowry; and then make speeches about my own property? You too urge that, do you? Isn't it better to take the bull by the horns? You'll be good and sorry if you say another word. My dispute is with Pamphila. Just you urge her to change her mind when you see her. For, Sophrona, as I hope for salvation, when I'm on the way home—did you see the pond as you passed? That's where I'm going to spend the night ducking the life out of you and I'll force you to agree with me instead of taking sides against me. (*He approaches* CHARISIUS' *house where he expects to find* PAMPHILA *alone and unprotected.*) The door is shut, so I must knock. Boys! Boys! Open the door, someone. Boys! Don't you hear me?

ONESIMUS

(*Opening the door but not admitting* SMICRINES, *for his newly-gained freedom has made him suddenly bold*)

Who's that knocking? Ha, Smicrines, that strict accountant, come for his dowry and his daughter.

SMICRINES (*surprised*)

Himself, curse you.

ONESIMUS

And sure, he's right. His haste befits a man of calculation and great wisdom. (*He notices* SOPHRONA, *helpless in the grip of* SMICRINES *and is struck by her humorous resemblance to Persephoné or to any other beauty in the hands of a ravisher.*) And his prize, Lord save us, what a stunner!

SMICRINES

By all the gods and spirits . . .

ONESIMUS

Do you believe, Smicrines, that the gods can spare the time to mete out daily to every individual his share of good or evil?

SMICRINES

What's that?

ONESIMUS

I'll make it quite plain. The total number of cities in the world is approximately a thousand. Each has thirty thousand inhabitants. Are the gods busy damning or saving each of them one by one? Surely not, for so you make them lead a life of toil. Then are they not at all concerned for us, you'll say. In each man they have placed his character as commander. This ever present guardian it is that ruins one man, if he fails to use it aright, and saves another. (*Indicating himself.*) This is our god, this the cause of each man's good or evil fortune. Propitiate this by doing nothing absurd or foolish, that good fortune may attend you.

SMICRINES

So my character, you scurvy knave, is doing something foolish now, is it?

ONESIMUS

It's wrecking you.

SMICRINES

What impudence!

ONESIMUS

But do you really think it right, Smicrines, to separate a daughter from her husband?

SMICRINES

Who says it is right? In this case though it's necessary.

ONESIMUS

You see? Wrong is necessary by his reasoning. It's not his character but something else that is ruining him (*He taps his forehead significantly.*) Now this once, when you were bent on evil action, pure luck has delivered you. You arrive to find what was amiss all settled and atonement made. But another time, Smicrines, I warn you, don't let me catch you getting headstrong. But now I release you from these charges. Go find inside your grandson and salute him.

SMICRINES

My grandson, you carrion!

ONESIMUS

So you too were a blockhead for all you thought you were so wise. Is this the way you kept your eye on a young girl ripe for marriage? That's the reason we have these miraculous five-month infants to bring up.

SMICRINES

I don't know what you mean.

ONESIMUS

Yes, but the old woman knows, I fancy. That time at the Tauropolia it was my master, Sophrona, who found her separated from the dancers. Do you see?

SOPHRONA

Yes.

ONESIMUS

And now they've recognized each other and all's well.

SMICRINES (*to* SOPHRONA)

What's this he's saying, you cursed hag?

SOPHRONA (*quoting Euripides*)

'Twas Nature's will who recketh naught of laws,
And Nature made her woman for this very cause.

SMICRINES

What, have you lost your senses?

SOPHRONA

I'll quote you a whole passage from the *Auge* of Euripides, complete, if you won't see at last.

SMICRINES

Your tragic airs drive me wild. Are you fully aware of what he is saying?

SOPHRONA

I'm well aware.

ONESIMUS

You may be sure that the nurse knew before.

SMICRINES

But it's a frightful thing.

SOPHRONA

There never was anything more fortunate. If what you say is true, the child belongs to both, and all is well.

(*The rest is missing.* SMICRINES, ONESIMUS, *and* SOPHRONA *will be ready to go in after a few more lines, and with their disappearance the play will end.*)

III

THE SHEARING OF GLYCERA

Characters in the Play

Sosia, Polemon's *sergeant*
Doris, *slave of* Glycera
Moschion, *a wealthy young man*
Davus, *his slave*
Pataecus, *an elderly friend of* Polemon
Polemon, *a Corinthian soldier*
Glycera, *a foundling, mistress of* Polemon

INTRODUCTION

by L. A. Post

In the *Perikeiromené* or *Shearing of Glycera*, Menander treats again the theme of love and the improvement effected in a man by enforced prostration at the feet of a mistress. In this play the hero is of a very different type from Charisius of *The Arbitration*. He is a Corinthian, Polemon by name, who has seen service in Macedonian armies at a time when such service brought comparative wealth to the soldier. Polemon is a notable representative of the military type. He evidently is perfectly at home in camps and thoroughly at a loss to deal with situations that do not yield to the sword. He is an overgrown boy, petulant, simple-minded, rash in action, difficult to live with, but always forgivable.

The heroine may also be contrasted with Pamphila in *The Arbitration*. Glycera has in her life no background of wealth. Originally one of those forlorn abandoned infants of whom we hear so often in Greek comedy, she had been picked up and reared by a woman of modest income, who had, however, because of those same Macedonian wars that enriched the soldier, been reduced to the very depths of poverty. It was out of the question that Glycera should marry; rather it was matter of congratulation that she could be joined in an irregular union to the prosperous soldier Polemon, who at least loved his mistress and treated her with lavish generosity.

Another character is Moschion, the Bob Acres of the play. He is the spoiled darling of a wealthy lady, Myrrhiné, whom he supposes to be his mother. He cuts a dash in the town and is chock-full of that inordinate self-esteem which is the favourite target of comedy. In reality he is twin brother to Glycera and in origin like her a foundling. This fact, known to her, but not to him, is important for the motivation of the play. His supposed mother, Myrrhiné, does not appear in the parts of the play that have come down to us. She is not only Moschion's adopted mother but a good friend of Glycera.

There are four other characters: Moschion's slave Davus; Glycera's

maid Doris, who is Polemon's slave, bought for Glycera's service; Sosia, Polemon's sergeant, who is boisterous at all times and often drunk to boot; and Pataecus, an elderly friend of Polemon, who turns out at the end of the play to be the long-lost father of the once more united twins.

Of the play we have less than half, but still enough to give us a good deal of the plot, since our material comprises sections from near the beginning, the middle, and the end of the play. Unfortunately one long scene is concerned chiefly with humorous by-play which, in the condition of the text, is not very intelligible. I shall accordingly omit some of it in my translation. The text is badly mutilated and uncertain in many places. There are two houses in the scene, that occupied by Myrrhiné and Moschion, and the house which Polemon provides for Glycera. The play probably began with the scene which gives it its title. There is an altercation between Glycera and Polemon. The latter had the evening before returned from the war and had surprised Glycera in the embrace of her fashionable neighbour, Moschion. He naturally leapt to the conclusion that Glycera was unfaithful to him and now in a fit of frenzy draws his sword and leaves her reft of her locks, an object of derision and aversion.

After this brief scene the stage is cleared and the personified figure of Misapprehension appears. Most of her speech remains. She tells how the twins were exposed and how they were found by a woman who took them up. The rest can be given in her own words.

MISAPPREHENSION

The woman gladly took the girl herself, and gave the boy to a rich lady who wanted a baby; she lives in the house that you see here on your right. Now several years passed, and the war and the misfortunes of Corinth went from bad to worse. The old lady was in dire need; the girl was now grown up—you saw her on the stage a moment ago—and this impetuous youth that you also saw, a Corinthian by birth, had fallen in love with her; so she gave the girl into his keeping, ostensibly as her own daughter. Later though, when she had become quite feeble and foresaw her life approaching harbour, as it were, she did not let the secret die, but told the young woman how she had picked her up, and gave her at the same time the baby clothes that she had been wrapped in. She also told her of her brother by birth, of whom she had known nothing, thus providing for certain possibilities. The girl might for instance be some day in need of assistance, and she knew that he was her only kinsman. The disclosure was also a safeguard to prevent any accidental developments between the young people because of me, Misapprehension. Anything might have happened, for he was rich and constantly fired with wine, she knew, while the girl was young and pretty, and there was no stability in her present protector.

Well, the woman died and the soldier not long ago bought the house here on your left. But though the girl lives next door to her brother, she has disclosed nothing. She does not want to bring about any alteration in his position, for he seems to be brilliantly placed; she wants him to profit by the gifts of fortune. He did get sight of her, however, by accident. He has plenty of self-confidence, as I said, and so has been purposely visiting the house. Last evening she happened to be sending her maid on some errand, and, as soon as he saw her at the door up he rushed and fell a-kissing and a-hugging her. She, though, knowing beforehand that he was her brother, didn't run away. But Polemon arrives and sees them. The rest he has told himself, how he left her with a warning that he would see her again when he had time, while she stood weeping and lamenting that she could not freely do as she had. Now all this blaze was kindled for the sake of what is coming. It has made Polemon fall into a rage. That was my doing; he's not that kind of person naturally. And it is the first step towards bringing the rest of the story to light, so that the twins may find their friends at last.

So if anyone is offended at what he has seen (*Polemon cutting off Glycera's hair*) and has supposed that the girl was disgraced, he will have to alter his views; for a god may overrule the evil that is done and turn it into good. Farewell, our audience, be gracious and support us in the rest of our play. (*The first act ends as* MISAPPREHENSION *leaves the stage.*)

THE SHEARING OF GLYCERA

ACT II

(SOSIA *comes from* POLEMON'S *house, carrying a cloak. He has been sent for it from the country where* POLEMON *is at present staying.*)

SOSIA

OUR blustering warrior of a while ago, who sets his ban on women having hair, lies flat on his back a-sobbing. When I left just now, lunch was being got for them, and his comrades were met to console him. And since he has no way of learning what is happening here, he has dispatched me for the special purpose of fetching a cloak—not that he needs anything, he wants me to have the walk.

(*Meanwhile* GLYCERA, *frightened out of her wits at the soldier's violence, has decided that she must at any cost gain assistance. She resolves to appeal to her neighbour, Myrrhiné, and to enlist her support. She will say nothing to* MOSCHION, *if she can avoid it. She orders* DORIS *first to make sure that* SOSIA *has gone, for he will not be so ready as* DORIS *to risk* POLEMON'S *vengeance by helping* GLYCERA. DORIS *will then get in touch with Myrrhiné, as a preliminary to* GLYCERA'S *flight.* SOSIA *lingers only a moment after* DORIS *appears.*)

DORIS

I'll go out and see, mistress.

SOSIA (*aside*)

There's Doris! What a girl she's got to be, how she is flourishing! They do live somehow, I can see that with half an eye, so they do. But I'll be off.

(*He goes to report to* POLEMON.)

DORIS (*at the door of Myrrhiné's house*)

I'll knock, since none of them are out of doors. Unhappy the woman whose husband is a soldier! A violent lot they are, one and all, you never can trust them. O mistress mine, how unfairly he treats you! (*Calling*) Boys! It will cheer him up to hear that she's crying now, for that's what

master wanted. (*Someone comes to Myrrhiné's door.*) Boy, please ask . . .

(*Here our text breaks off and a page or two are missing, in which Myrrhiné probably appeared and, on hearing of* GLYCERA'S *plight, consented to take her in and hear her story. The transfer is soon made.* GLYCERA *leaves behind her wardrobe and her maid, which belong to* POLEMON, *and is welcomed by Myrrhiné.* MOSCHION *was not at home. Perhaps he was keeping out of the way of his belligerent neighbour. But* MOSCHION'S *servant* DAVUS *was in the house and drew his own conclusions from what he had seen. He comes from the house as the revellers who are to amuse the spectators between acts come in sight. He speaks to those inside.*)

DAVUS

But, fellows, here come a crowd of young men carousing. Mistress is in a class by herself, I'll say. She is taking the girl right into the house. There's a mother for you! Now to find my young master, for apparently the moment has come when he can't arrive on the scene too soon, so it looks to me. (DAVUS *goes to the city and the band of revellers occupy the stage and amuse the audience between acts.*)

ACT III

(DAVUS *returns with* MOSCHION, *who naturally finds it hard to believe that his mother has really taken* GLYCERA *into the house by way of facilitating his amours.*)

MOSCHION (*protesting*)

DAVUS, you've often enough before now brought me stories that hadn't a word of truth in them. In fact, you're a fraud and a good-for-nothing. So if you're leading me on a wild-goose chase this time too. . . .

DAVUS (*confident*)

String me up for a beating at once, if I am.

MOSCHION

That's drawing it mild.

DAVUS

Then treat me to all the horrors of war. But if I *am* right and you find her here in the house, what then? I've managed it all for you, Moschion, I wasted tons of arguments persuading the girl to come to this house, and your mother to take her in and carry out your wishes in everything; what am I offered by way of promotion?

(*There is an exchange of pleasantries between* MOSCHION *and* DAVUS, *and the latter is finally promised as a reward the opportunity to start in business on a small scale. He then continues.*)

DAVUS

Amen to that, as they say in meeting. Now then, this way, master, the portals wait thy entrance.

MOSCHION (*approaching the door*)

Audacity's my cue now, console the poor girl and cheer her up; snap my fingers at that miserable major, ostrich plumes and all.

DAVUS

Absolutely.

MOSCHION (*discreetly*)

Just you run in, please, Davus, and spy out the general situation. Find out where my mother is, whether they're expecting me or not. I needn't mention every little thing in a case of this sort, you know the ropes.

DAVUS

I'll go.

MOSCHION

I'll be waiting for you, Davus, pacing the street in front. (DAVUS *goes in.*) Well, she did betray some such feeling when I accosted her last evening. When I rushed up, instead of running off, she threw her arms about me and hugged me. I'm not unattractive, it would seem, to look at or to have to do with either. I really think so, by Athena, the hussies like me. But I really must knock wood.

DAVUS (*returning*)

Moschion, she's made her toilet and is sitting there.

MOSCHION

O you darling!

DAVUS

Your mother is going about arranging something or other, but lunch is ready and, as far as I can judge by what they are doing, they're waiting for you—and have been for some time, for that matter.

MOSCHION

Is there anything unattractive about me? Did you tell them that I was here?

DAVUS

No indeed.

MOSCHION

Then go and tell them now.

DAVUS

As you see, I'm there and back. (*Exit.*)

MOSCHION (*to himself*)

She'll be bashful when I enter, that's of course; and she'll hide her face, that's the way they do. But as I go in, I must kiss mother the first thing, make her my staunch ally, dance attendance on her, follow her wishes implicitly, for it might be her affair, the way she treats it. But someone is coming out. (DAVUS *comes from the house quite crestfallen.*) What does this mean, fellow? How you hesitate about approaching me, Davus!

DAVUS

Yes, by Zeus, for I don't understand it. When I went and told your mother that you were here, 'No more of that,' says she, 'how has he heard? Did you go blabbing to him that this girl was frightened and sought refuge here?' 'Certainly I did.' 'May you never see the year out,' says she. 'Now just you clear out, boy, and march off out of the way.' It's really so. All our hopes are dashed to the ground. She was anything but glad to hear that you had come.

MOSCHION

You scoundrel, you've played me a fine trick.

DAVUS

Nonsense! It's your mother . . .

MOSCHION

What's that? Isn't she taking the girl in freely? Or what is the matter? Didn t you say you persuaded the girl to come to the house for my sake?

DAVUS

I told you that I persuaded her to come? By Apollo, I never did. Do you think, master, that I'm not telling the truth?

MOSCHION

So you didn't say either just now that you helped persuade my mother yourself to take her into the house on my account?

DAVUS

Yes, that, as you see, I did say. Oh yes, I recall it.

MOSCHION

And that you thought she was doing it for my sake.

DAVUS

That I can't say, but I certainly urged her.

MOSCHION

Very well. Just step this way.

DAVUS

Where?

MOSCHION

Not far. You'll find out.

DAVUS

What was I going to say, Moschion? . . . At that time I . . . Wait just a bit.

MOSCHION

A cock-and-bull story to me, eh?

DAVUS

No, no, by Asclepius, no indeed, if you'll only listen. Most likely she doesn't want, don't you see, to surrender to the first assault with no formalities. She wants to know first all about you, to hear what you have to say. Yes indeed. You see she hasn't come like a flute-girl or like some moth-eaten street-walker either.

MOSCHION

That sounds to me like talking sense again, Davus.

DAVUS

Think it over. It's not absurd. She's left home. That's no cock-and-bull story. If you'll just disappear for three or four days, you'll find someone will get attached to you. I was given to understand that. You must listen now.

MOSCHION

Where am I to tie you up and leave you? You're arranging for me to cool my heels a longish while. You lied a moment ago and now here you are rattling on again.

DAVUS

I can't think with you interrupting. Ship oars, as it were, and go indoors quietly.

MOSCHION

While you take to your heels!

DAVUS

Of course! Don't you see that I have provisions?

MOSCHION (*pretending to yield, but retaining* DAVUS)

To be sure. Well, you lead the way, Davus. By going in with me, you can help me get something straightened out here. I yield the point to you.

DAVUS (*to himself*)

A close shave, by Heracles. Even now I'm wilted with terror. The situation isn't so easily diagnosed as I once supposed.

(MOSCHION *departs into the house, preceded by* DAVUS. *Meanwhile* POLEMON *has been somewhat consoled by* SOSIA'S *report that he had seen* GLYCERA. *Though he knows nothing as yet of* GLYCERA'S *leaving his house, his anxiety leads him to dispatch* SOSIA *on another scouting expedition.* SOSIA *is talking to himself as he approaches* POLEMON'S *house.*)

SOSIA

Again I'm sent with his sword and cloak to see what she's doing and report on my return. I'm within an ace of telling him I found his rival in the house, just to make him jump up and come running. I would, too, if I weren't heartily sorry for him. To see my master so unfortunate! It's no dream either. Seeing is believing. What a bitter home-coming! (*As he enters* POLEMON'S *house,* DORIS *slips out and waits for his reappearance with some concern.*)

DORIS (*alone*)

The sergeant has come. It's a bad situation in every way, so it is, by Apollo. And at that there's the biggest item still to be accounted for, my master, once he gets back from the country—what a row he'll make when he appears on the scene.

(*As* SOSIA *comes out,* DORIS *retires to avoid his truculence. He has discovered* GLYCERA'S *absence and intends to find her. He is speaking to the servants within as he appears.*)

SOSIA

But you've let her go, you ungodly swine, you've let her leave the house!

DORIS (*to herself*)

The fellow's coming out again showing signs of temper. I'll retire a bit.

SOSIA (*to himself*)

She's gone straight off next door, that's plain, to her lover; as for us, we can curse our luck good and plenty, that's her attitude.

DORIS (*to herself*)

The captain got a fortune-teller when he got you. You're pretty warm.

SOSIA

I'll knock at their door. (SOSIA *is just about to knock boldly at Myrrhinê's door when* DAVUS *appears at some point of vantage and speaks.*)

DAVUS

What do you want, you unfortunate specimen of humanity? Where are you going in such a hurry?

SOSIA

Do you live here?

DAVUS

Perhaps. But what's keeping you from your work?

SOSIA

For heaven's sake, have you people lost your wits? Have you the audacity to keep a free woman under lock and key, in violation of the rights of her lawful master?

DAVUS

How vile, how unscrupulous a man must be to descend to such scurrilous charges!

SOSIA

Do you think we're chicken-hearted, that we're not men?

DAVUS

Oh yes, heaven knows you're men, shilling-a-day men. When you've got a few guinea-a-day men on your side, then we'll be ready to fight you.

SOSIA

Heracles, what a shameless exhibition! So you admit you have her; speak out.

DAVUS

Fellow, begone.

SOSIA (*pretending to call to a comrade*)

Hilarion! He's gone. He happens to be an eye-witness and says you have her.

DAVUS

Before long I hope to see some of you tied up and howling.

SOSIA

Who do you think you're playing with? What are you drivelling about? We'll storm this wretched shanty double quick. Get the lady-killer into his armour.

DAVUS

Hard luck, you poor thing. Have you been hanging around all this time, because you thought she was here?

SOSIA

To arms, fellows! (*Turning to* DAVUS.) They'll ransack the whole place quick as a wink, call 'em shilling-a-day men or not.

DAVUS

I wasn't serious when I said that. The truth is you're a sewer-rat.

SOSIA

You call yourselves civilized . . .

DAVUS

But we haven't got her.

SOSIA

Faugh! I'll take a pike to you.

DAVUS

Clear out and be damned. I'm going, since you've apparently lost your wits.

(DAVUS *disappears and* DORIS *comes from her hiding-place.*)

DORIS

Sosia!

SOSIA

If you'll just step this way, Doris, I'll give you a very bad time. You're at the bottom of this.

DORIS

Bless you, tell me why. Because she was frightened and took refuge somewhere with a woman?

SOSIA

Frightened and took refuge somewhere with a woman?

DORIS

As a matter of fact she's gone to Myrrhiné's next door. If that isn't so, may I never get what I want.

SOSIA

You see where she's off to—where the object of her affection is, that's where.

(*Here the text breaks off entirely. Perhaps seventy lines are missing. When the next fragment takes up the story,* POLEMON *is present, accompanied by* SOSIA *and his army, a motley crew, and at least one light-'o-love,* HABROTONON, *who has her flute with her.* SOSIA *is drunk and boisterous.* POLEMON *is ready for any violence in order to regain* GLYCERA. *The restraining influence is provided by* PATAECUS, *an elderly friend of* POLEMON. POLEMON *had appealed to him to aid in the recovery of* GLYCERA. PATAECUS *had agreed to act in* POLEMON'S *interest, but insisted on the dismissal of the army, before negotiations should be undertaken.* POLEMON *is inclined to listen, but* SOSIA *is all for action.*)

SOSIA

He's come from them with his pockets lined. Trust me. He's a traitor to you and the army.

PATAECUS (*to* SOSIA)

Go off and have a nap, my dear fellow. Forget these battles. You're not well. (*Turning to* POLEMON) I'll talk to you. You're not so tipsy.

SOSIA (*indignant*)

Not so tipsy! When I've drunk perhaps half a pint, because I knew what would happen, worse luck, and was keeping myself fit for the emergency.

PATAECUS

Quite right. Just do as I say.

(SOSIA *subsides for a moment.*)

POLEMON (*to* PATAECUS)

What advice have you for me?

PATAECUS

That's a proper question. Now then, it's my turn to talk to you.

SOSIA (*to a light-o'-love in the company*)

Sound the alarm, Habrotonon.

(*There is a new outbreak on the part of the army.*)

PATAECUS (*to* POLEMON)

First send this fellow inside with his followers.

SOSIA (*protesting*)

That's poor strategy. Are you going to dismiss the army when you should carry the place by assault? This Pataecus here is ruining me.

PATAECUS (*impatiently*)

Is there no one in command?

POLEMON (*to* SOSIA)

For heaven's sake, fellow, be off.

SOSIA

I'm off. I thought you would *do* something.

(*He departs with* HABROTONON *and the army amid scurrilous jests. All go inside but* SOSIA, *who collapses at the door and goes to sleep.*)

PATAECUS

If your statement is correct about what took place, Polemon, and the girl is your lawful wife——

POLEMON

The very idea! Of course she is.

PATAECUS

But it's of some importance.

POLEMON

I have always looked on her as my wife.

PATAECUS

Don't shout. Who put her into your hands?

POLEMON

Who? Why, she herself.

PATAECUS

Very fine. Very likely you suited her then. Now, though, you don't, and she's gone off because you didn't use her properly.

POLEMON

What! Not use her properly! That hurts me more than anything you have said yet.

PATAECUS

I know perfectly well that you'll say in the end that at the present moment you're behaving like a lunatic. What's the idea? Whom are you going to abduct? She is her own mistress. When a man's at a disadvantage and loves a woman, no course is open but to win her by fair words.

POLEMON

But haven't I a case against the man who seduced her in my absence?

PATAECUS

A case to justify lodging a complaint, if you finally resort to argument. But if you take the law into your own hands, you lose your case. You see the offence doesn't justify retaliation, but only the lodging of a complaint.

POLEMON

Not even now?

(*Now that she has gone to* MOSCHION, *as he supposes.*)

PATAECUS

Not even now.

POLEMON

I don't know what I'm to say, by Demeter, except that I shall hang myself. Glycera has gone and left me—gone and left me, Glycera—Pataecus. Well, if you really think that's the best we can do—since you used to be a friend of hers and have often talked with her before—you go and speak with her; plead my case with her, I entreat you.

PATAECUS

You see, I think that's the best you can do.

POLEMON

Of course you can speak effectively, Pataecus?

PATAECUS

Oh, passably.

POLEMON

But, Pataecus, really you must. Our only hope is in that. If ever I have done her the least wrong—if it doesn't remain through all the one object of my ambition—I wish you could see her fine clothes.

PATAECUS

Don't worry.

POLEMON

Do please look at them, Pataecus. You'll feel for me more strongly.

PATAECUS

O Lord!

POLEMON

Come this way. What clothes! and what a marvellous sight she is, when she puts any of them on! Maybe you hadn't seen her?

PATAECUS

Oh yes, I have.

POLEMON

For that matter, she was handsome enough, no doubt of that, to be worth looking at. But what's the good of dragging in the fact that she's handsome now, addlepate that I am, rambling on about what makes no difference.

PATAECUS

Not at all, not at all.

POLEMON

Really? But indeed you must take a look. Do step this way. Come along.

PATAECUS (*yielding to the inevitable*)

I'm coming.

(*As they disappear into* POLEMAN'S *house to inspect* GLYCERA'S *wardrobe,* MOSCHION *comes from Myrrhine's house armed for combat. He shouts at the retreating enemy, who can no longer hear him.*)

MOSCHION

Make yourselves scarce this minute, you; get in. Armed with spears have they leapt forth upon me! But they couldn't storm a swallow's nest, the sort of sneaking villains that are here. (*Looking round and seeing no one but the drunken* SOSIA.) "But," says he, "they had trained soldiers," and your far-famed soldiers amount to this one Sosia here. (*Reflectively*) There have been a good many made miserable in recent times, for, whatever the reason may be, misery's a crop that doesn't fail anywhere in Greece nowadays, but I don't believe among them all there's a living human being as miserable as I am; no, I don't. As soon as I entered, instead of doing as I always have, going to my mother in her room, or sum-

moning someone from the inner rooms to me, I went into a little room out of the way and there I lay down most composedly. Meanwhile I send Davus in to make my presence known, no other message, to my mother. He, however, with mighty little concern for me, finding them in the midst of lunch, proceeded to stow away all he could, while I in the meantime was lying on my couch and saying to myself: 'My mother will be here directly with a message from my sweetheart, letting me know on what terms she consents to join me.' I was practising a speech myself——

(*Here there is a long gap of about one hundred and sixty verses.* MOSCHION *probably went on to relate how he was finally undeceived in regard to* GLYCERA'S *intentions by overhearing a conversation between her and his mother, which also roused his curiosity in regard to his own identity and in regard to* GLYCERA'S *antecedents. At the point where we are able to take up the story again, these difficulties are in process of solution.* GLYCERA *has come out and is talking to* PATAECUS, *who, it will be remembered, had agreed to act as* POLEMON'S *ambassador and to induce her, if possible, to return to the soldier.* GLYCERA *is emphatically pointing out to* PATAECUS *that he has made a great mistake in accepting* POLEMON'S *view that she had left him for* MOSCHION, *and that she had formed a liaison with the latter during the soldier's absence.*)

GLYCERA (*excited and emphatic*)

You're not considering what possible *aim* I could have had in that case in coming to his *mother's* house and in taking refuge *here*. Could I have hoped that he would *marry* me? Oh yes, he's quite on a level with *me* in birth. If not that, then maybe I hoped to become his *mistress*. Well, in that case wouldn't I and he too do our best, for pity's sake, to keep it a *secret* from his parents? Should I, instead, have planted myself recklessly in his *father's* way? Should I have been foolish enough to choose a course that would make me hated *here* and implant in *your* minds a suspicion that could never again be effaced? Should I feel no *shame* even, Pataecus? Did you too come to me convinced of *that;* did you suppose that I had come to be *that sort?*

PATAECUS

I hope not indeed, by Zeus on high. I hope, moreover, that you'll prove our suspicions really false, as I for my part am convinced they were. But go back to Polemon nevertheless.

GLYCERA

Let him insult other girls hereafter.

PATAECUS

The outrage wasn't a deliberate act.

GLYCERA

It was a wicked act, and even a slave girl, for pity's sake, isn't treated like that.

(*A few lines are missing in which* GLYCERA *offers to produce evidence of her free status and describes the tokens that were her only heritage. She begs* PATAECUS *to take her part and help her assert her independence. He begins to suspect that she may be his long-lost daughter. She is speaking of the tokens.*)

GLYCERA

From her I received some keepsakes of my father and mother, which she bade me keep in my possession at all times and not lose.

PATAECUS

Well, what do you want?

GLYCERA

I want them brought to me.

PATAECUS

You're still determined to break with the man for good? What's your wish, my dear girl?

GLYCERA

I want you to arrange it for me. Will you do it?

PATAECUS

It shall be done. It's but a trifle; but you ought to take everything into consideration.

GLYCERA

I know my own affairs best

PATAECUS

So that's that. Which of the maids knows where you keep these things?

GLYCERA

Doris does

PATAECUS (*going to the door of* POLEMON'S *house*)

Tell Doris to come outside, some one. (*To* GLYCERA) All the same, Glycera, I entreat you, do yield and forgive him on the terms I propose.

DORIS (*coming out*)

Oh, mistress, what is it? What trouble we are in!

GLYCERA

Fetch me out the casket that has the embroidered things in it, Doris. Do you know it?

DORIS

Yes, indeed.

GLYCERA

The one I gave you to keep. Why are you crying, poor girl?

PATAECUS

By God Almighty I have a very strange feeling.

(*Here a few verses are missing. We next find* PATAECUS *and* GLYCERA *examining the contents of the casket together.* PATAECUS *is attempting to identify the embroidery with some that he remembered from long ago*.)

PATAECUS

The same as I saw then. Isn't this next one a goat or a bull or some such beast.

GLYCERA

It's a stag, my friend, not a goat.

PATAECUS

It has horns, I know that. And the third one here is a winged horse. These things belonged to my wife, poor, poor woman.

(*He weeps as he studies the tokens. From this point the metre more and more suggests operatic music. During this conversation* MOSCHION *has been listening unseen. He soliloquizes.*)

MOSCHION

It's an impossibility, that's the only conclusion I can arrive at, any way I look at it, that my mother should have had a child and should secretly have abandoned a daughter born to her But if it did happen and Glycera is my sister, then my disaster is complete, curse the luck.

PATAECUS (*to* GLYCERA)

Well I knew some of them—the relics of my past.

GLYCERA

Examine me on any point you please.

PATAECUS

Where did you get these things that you have? Tell me.

GLYCERA

They are the clothes I had once as a foundling.

MOSCHION (*to himself*)

Launch out into the deep! Borne helpless on the waves I reach the crisis of my own fortune.

PATAECUS

Was there no other? Make that clear to me.

GLYCERA

There was indeed. With me a brother was abandoned.

MOSCHION (*to himself*)

That answers one of my questions.

PATAECUS

What then caused your separation?

GLYCERA

I could explain it all, for I have heard the tale. But question me about myself, since that is mine to tell. The rest I've given her my oath I'll not disclose.

MOSCHION (*to himself*)

That statement gives me a plain clue, for she gave my mother an oath. Where in the world am I?

PATAECUS

Who took you in and kept you, pray?

GLYCERA

A woman kept me, she who found me lying there.

PATAECUS

Some indication of the place had you from her?

GLYCERA

A spring she mentioned and a shady nook.

PATAECUS

The same that he who left the babes described to me.

GLYCERA

And who was he? If naught prevents, let me know too.

PATAECUS

A servant left you there, 'twas I who feared to rear you.
(*He embraces* GLYCERA *as his long-lost daughter.*)

GLYCERA

You abandoned your own children? What induced you?

PATAECUS

Many are the sudden freaks, my child, of fortune. Your mother died in bearing you, and just the day before, my daughter—

GLYCERA

What happened, pray? God's mercy, how I tremble!

PATAECUS

I was reduced to poverty, though used to wealth.

GLYCERA

What! In one day? A frightful blow, ye gods!

PATAECUS

News reached me that the ship which was our sole support was lost beneath the wild Aegean's briny waves.

GLYCERA

O pity! what a fate was mine!

PATAECUS

And so I chose to think that, facing beggary with clinging babes like boats in tow, 'twould class a man as utter fool to try to keep them. I sacrificed the best of all things, daughter. What is the rest like?

GLYCERA

It shall all be listed. There was a necklace with a few engraved gems that were put with the babes as marks of recognition.

PATAECUS

Shall we inspect them.

GLYCERA

We can't now.

PATAECUS

Why so?

GLYCERA

My brother got the rest as his share, of course.

MOSCHION (*to himself*)

Then this man, so it seems, is my father.

PATAECUS

Can you tell me what there was?

GLYCERA

There was a silver girdle.

PATAECUS

So there was.

GLYCERA

And the pattern on it girls in a dance. You recall it then? And a transparent wrap and a gold head-band. That completes the list.

(*Here another gap intervenes with some indication that* MOSCHION *at this point declares himself and embraces his father and his sister.* GLYCERA'S *fortune is made and* POLEMON *has now no hope of winning her back. It is, however, just her new-found security that gives her confidence to face him and accept him once more as a lover. The final scene is preserved.* POLEMON *is talking to* DORIS.)

POLEMON

I intended to hang myself.

DORIS

Oh, don't do that.

POLEMON

But what am I to do, Doris? How am I to live, God have mercy on me, apart from her?

DORIS

She'll come back to you—

POLEMON

Gracious heaven, what news!

DORIS

If you'll do your best to be kind hereafter.

POLEMON

I'd never fall short in anything, I assure you, for you are more than right. Go at once. I'll set you free to-morrow, Doris. (*Exit* DORIS.) But let me tell you what you are to say. She's gone in. Oh, my angry, angry passions, how you took me by storm! It was a brother, not a lover to

whom she gave that kiss. And I, fiend that I was, utterly blind with jealousy, at once ran amuck. As a result I was going to hang myself and for good reason. (DORIS *returns.*) What news, my dear Doris?

DORIS

Good news; she will come to you.

POLEMON

Are you mocking me?

DORIS

No, by Aphrodité. But she was dressing up and parading for her father. Now you ought at once to celebrate her good fortune with a feast—it came in time of need—now that her ship has come in at last.

POLEMON

By Zeus I will, for you're quite right. The cook from the market is in the house, let him slaughter the sow.

DORIS

But where's the basket, and the other requirements?

POLEMON

The basket can wait, only let him get the sow slaughtered. Better than that, I'll rob some altar of a wreath myself and put it on.

(*Does so*)

DORIS

Yes, you'll look a lot more convincing so.

POLEMON

Now bring Glycera at once.

DORIS

Really she was just about to come out—with her father.

POLEMON

What, he? What will become of me?

(POLEMON *retreats into his house.*)

DORIS

Goodness, what are you doing? He's run away. Is it so terrible when a door rattles? I'll go in myself to do what I can to help.

(DORIS *also retires as* PATAECUS *leads* GLYCERA, *now handsomely arrayed, on to the stage.*)

PATAECUS (*to* GLYCERA)

I'm quite delighted to hear you say you'll do your part to be friends again. When prosperity arrives, to accept satisfaction then, that's a mark of the true Greek spirit. But let some one run and fetch him.

POLEMON (*emboldened, from his retreat*)

No, I'll come out myself. I was preparing a Thanksgiving feast, to celebrate the news that Glycera had discovered those that she wanted to.

PATAECUS

You are quite right. Now, though, attend to what I'm going to say. I bestow this woman on you as your lawful wife.

POLEMON

As such I take her.

PATAECUS

With a dowry of three talents.

POLEMON

That's very good too.

PATAECUS

From now on forget that you are a soldier and spare your friends any inconsiderate acts.

POLEMON

Heaven help me! When I've come within an ace of ruin this time, is it likely I shall ever be inconsiderate again? I won't even find fault with Glycera. Only be friends, dearest.

GLYCERA

I will, for this time your losing your head led to good fortune.

POLEMON

So it did, my dear.

GLYCERA

Consequently I've consented to forgive you.

POLEMON (*as they go in together*)

Do join our celebration, Pataecus.

PATAECUS

I must set about arranging another wedding, since I'm marrying my son to Philinus' daughter.

MOSCHION (*appearing suddenly and protesting*)

O powers above——

(*This is all we have of the play, which is evidently drawing to a close.*)

GLOSSARY

In order not to swell unreasonably an already bulky volume, the following classes of proper names have been omitted from this Glossary: 1. Geographical names of purely ornamental or entirely obvious significance; 2. Personal names introduced for merely genealogical reasons; 3. The names of a large number of Persian generals; 4. Names of persons in Comedy about whom nothing is known beyond what can be deduced from the contexts in which they are mentioned. Not all the omissions are covered by these categories, but it is hoped that nothing really important has failed of treatment. The utmost brevity has been everywhere necessary, but inequalities have been unavoidable. The names in comedy generally require more extensive comment, but many are included simply because their meaning is significant; in these cases the translation is given in quotation marks.

Orthographical variants have not been separately entered. There is a regrettable amount of caprice in the transliteration of Greek names, and it has seemed best to give here a special compendium of variations.

VARIANT	NORMAL FORM	VARIANT	NORMAL FORM
a (final)	*é* or *as*	*k*	*c*
ai	*ae*	*oi*	*oe*
cde or *cd* (final)	*cdes*	*os* (final)	*us*
i or *e*	*ei*	*ou*	*u*
id (final)	*ides*	*u*	*y*

It will be observed that in the Glossary the forms above styled "normal" are by no means exclusively or consistently employed.

Until the latter half of the nineteenth century it was customary to designate Greek deities and heroes by the names of their Roman "equivalents," and some of the translations used in this book exhibit this practice. These Roman names have not been separately entered; the following list will direct the reader to the relevant articles in the Glossary.

ROMAN	GREEK	ROMAN	GREEK
Aesculapius	Asclepius	Minerva	Athene
Ceres	Demeter	Neptune	Poseidon
Diana	Artemis	Pollux	Polydeuces
Hercules	Heracles	Proserpina	Persephone
Juno	Hera	Saturn	Cronus
Jupiter, Jove	Zeus	Ulysses	Odysseus
Mars	Ares	Venus	Aphrodite
Mercury	Hermes	Vulcan	Hephaestus

GLOSSARY

ABAE. An old town in Phocis, noted for its temple and oracle of Apollo

ACADEMY A public garden in the suburbs of Athens, later the site of Plato's school.

ACASTUS Brother of Alcestis and son of Pelias, King of Iolcus He drove Jason and Medea into exile after the latter had contrived the death of Pelias He likewise exiled Peleus who had fallen in love with his wife Hippolyte.

ACESTOR. An alien *nouveau-riche* tragic poet, also called Sacas, father of Cleon's secretary Tisamenus

ACHAEA. In Homer this is practically the equivalent of Hellas, and Achaeans, Argives, and Danaans indifferently denote what a later age called Hellenes. The tragic dramatists are wont to imitate the epic poet in this usage.

ACHAEUS. Son of Xuthus and Creusa, who was regarded in the legends as the founder of the race of the Achaeans.

ACHARNIAN. Of or from Acharnae, an Attic deme some seven miles north of Athens. It was the largest of the rural towns in Attica Mount Parnes, located just behind it, was so closely timbered that the chief occupation of the Acharnians was the manufacture of charcoal Their military valour had long been famous, and the Spartan invasions which occurred so frequently during the Peloponnesian War could not but render them actively hostile to the Periclean policy of exhausting the enemy by refusing to meet him in a large and potentially decisive conflict.

ACHELOUS The largest and most celebrated river in Greece, rising on Mount Pindus, flowing through Acarnania, and emptying into the Ionian Sea. Also the god of this river, who was one of the most important of the numerous river-gods.

ACHERON A river in the Underworld

ACHILLES. Son of Peleus and Thetis, father of Neoptolemus, the greatest of the Greek warriors before Troy, finally slain by Paris.

ACRISIUS. See DANAE.

ACROPOLIS The citadel of Athens, a plateau of rock about 200 feet high on which numerous temples were located In early times the residence of the kings of the city. The public treasury was also situated here.

ACTAEON. A grandson of Cadmus, who saw Artemis and her nymphs bathing In anger the goddess changed him into a stag, and he was torn to pieces by his own hunting hounds.

ADIMANTUS An Athenian general suspected of treachery at the battle of Aegospotami, he was also a friend of Alcibiades.

ADMETUS King of Pherae in Thessaly, husband of Alcestis, son of Pheres

ADONIA. The festival in honor of Adonis

ADONIS. A fair youth whom Aphrodite loved so much that after his death, from a hunting wound or by the arrow of Artemis, she was allowed to have him on earth for half of each year. He is thus a symbol of the vege-

tation cycle. At Athens there were festivals in his honour in which only women took part.

ADRASTEIA. A goddess identified with Nemesis, a requiter of the sin of Pride. A district north of the Troad is called by her name.

ADRASTUS. King of Argos, and father-in-law to Polyneices.

ADRIA A town between the mouths of the Po and the Adige from which the Adriatic takes its name.

AEACUS Father of Peleus, Telamon, and Psamathe; so famous for his justice that he became one of the judges in the Underworld.

AEGEUS. An early king of Athens, the father of Theseus

AEGIALEUS. Son of Adrastus, the only Argive hero to fall in the attack upon Thebes made ten years after Polyneices' abortive attempt to take the city.

AEGICORES The name of a legendary Attic tribe, so called after a son of Ion.

AEGINA. 1. A daughter of the river-god Asopus, wife of Aeacus. 2. An island in the Saronic Gulf.

AEGIPLANCTUS. A mountain in Megaris

AEGIS. The shield of Zeus, from which lightning and thunder were thought to come; it was also carried by his daughter Athene. It is pictured as blazing brightly and fringed with golden tassels; in its centre is the awful head of a Gorgon.

AEGISTHUS Son of Thyestes, and cousin of Agamemnon See Introduction to Aeschylus' *Oresteia.*

AEGYPTUS. A king of Egypt whose fifty sons sought to marry the fifty daughters of Danaus, the twin brother of Aegyptus See the Introduction to Aeschylus' *The Suppliants.*

AENEAS. Trojan hero in the *Iliad.* After the fall of Troy, according to the legend, he led a band of Trojan survivors to Italy, where his descendants founded Rome

AENIAN The Aenianes were a tribe of southern Thessaly.

AEOLUS Ruler of Thessaly, father of Xuthus, ancestor of the Aeolians.

AESCHINES. A great boaster, who was particularly fond of talking about his wealth, although wherein this consisted was uncertain.

AETHER. Anglicized Ether, the upper air of the bright sky, thought somehow purer and more rarefied than the lower air Aristophanes regularly ascribed to Euripides a deification of Aether

AETHIOP KNIGHTS. The reference is to Memnon, son of Tithonus He was king of Aethiopia and aided the Trojans. Achilles finally slew him. He was a leading character in at least two lost plays of Aeschylus.

AETNA. 1. A volcanic mountain in the northeast of Sicily One of the Titans was believed to have been buried under it by the victorious Zeus 2 A town in Sicily, founded by the Syracusan tyrant Hiero.

AETOLIA A wild and mountainous region in western Greece In mythology it is the scene of many hunting legends

AEXONIA. A deme of Attica, more correctly Aexoneis The inhabitants were reputed to be very slanderous Laches was a demesman of Aexoneis

AGAMEMNON Son of Atreus, brother of Menelaus, king of Mycenae, leader of the Greek forces against Troy

AGATHON A fifth-century Athenian tragic dramatist whose personal delicacy and precious style are frequently satirized by Aristophanes

AGENOR Son of Poseidon, king of Phoenicia, father of Cadmus.

AGLAURUS Daughter of Cecrops, an Athenian heroine who gave her life to save her city

AGORACRITUS. "Market-place judge"

AGUIEUS. A title of Apollo, as guardian of streets and highways. Statues of him stood in front of the houses, and to these sacrifices were made.

AGYRRHIUS. An Athenian statesman who had indulged in paederasty in his earlier years He had been involved in a trial for embezzlement, but had won the people's favor by introducing pay

for attendance at the Assembly. The comic poets hated him because he had reduced the financial benefits which they had received from the state. He had become quite wealthy himself, and it would seem that he either ate too much or had a defective digestive tract.

AIDONEUS The equivalent of Hades, the god of the Underworld.

AJAX. Name of two Greek heroes in the Trojan War. One was the son of Telamon and was a perfect soldier, tall, strong, tireless, reliable The other was the son of Oileus, small but swift; he often acted in conjunction with his bulkier namesake

ALAE. The equivalent of Halae, a deme or village in Attica to which the statue of Artemis was supposed to have been brought from the Taurians.

ALCATHOUS A king of Megara.

ALCESTIS. Daughter of Pelias, and wife of Admetus, King of Thessaly See Euripides' *Alcestis*

ALCIBIADES An Athenian, son of Clinias, born around 450 Of a noble and wealthy family, gifted with beauty of person and an irresistible charm of manner, he might have become one of the greatest statesmen in Athens' history if he had possessed more self-control and stability. But the wildness of his life and the insecurity of his policy prevented the populace from ever quite placing complete confidence in him, and his magnificent ambitions experienced a series of frustrations

ALCIDES Heracles, grandson of Alcaeus

ALCMENA. Wife of Amphitryon and mother, by Zeus, of Heracles

ALEXANDER See PARIS

ALOPE. A mortal woman, who bore to Poseidon a son named Hippothoön

ALPHEUS A river in the Peloponnesus, flowing through Arcadia and Elis, near Olympia.

ALTHAEA Wife of Oeneus, a king of Calydon. Dionysus had been her lover.

AMAZONS A race of belligerent women who lived without contact with men, according to mythology, in the Caucasian regions, from which they were reputed to have made a number of invasions of Asia Minor and other countries. In the reign of Theseus they attacked Attica, and in the Trojan War they played a late and ineffective part. An attack on them was one of the exploits of Heracles

AMIPSIAS. A successful fifth-century Athenian comic poet

AMORGOS. An island in the Aegean, noted for the manufacture of very fine textiles; these were not silk, of course, but extremely soft linen, and the designation "transparent" must be taken to mean "clinging" or "revealing."

AMPHANAE. A town in Thessaly.

AMPHIARAUS An Argive seer and hero, one of the ill-fated Seven even though he foresaw the gloomy outcome of the expedition His wife had tricked him into going, and the prophet bade his sons avenge him When the attack on the city of Thebes was repulsed, Amphiaraus is reported to have been pursued by Periclymenus, but just as the Theban was about to catch him, the earth opened up and swallowed the seer The spot where this miracle occurred was in latter days oracular, its interpretations of dreams being especially sought after

AMPHICTYON. A delegate to the Amphictyonic Council, which carried on the affairs of the religious associations of Greek states which were called Amphictyonic Leagues. The derivation of the term is uncertain.

AMPHION Son of Zeus by Antiope, whom Lycus of Thebes had ill-treated Amphion and his brother Zethus accordingly attacked and captured the city, eventually putting to death Lycus and his wife Dirce. The city was then fortified with a wall Later Amphion married Niobe and became by her the father of numerous progeny, but Apollo killed them all and Amphion ended his own life because of his grief

AMPHITHEUS The name contains the

Greek word *theos,* "god"; it is found in connection with the legend of Demeter's search for Persephone, but the genealogy which Aristophanes makes his character expound is, of course, fictitious

AMPHITRITE A daughter of Nereus, wife of Poseidon Goddess of the sea, and mother of Triton.

AMYNIAS A cowardly brother of Aeschines

AMYNON. A notorious homosexual.

ANAPHLYSTIA. An Attic seaport whose name suggests the Greek word *anaphlan,* "masturbate"

ANACREON. An Ionian lyric poet, born at Teos on the coast of Asia Minor. His compositions were famous for the frequency with which they celebrated the pleasures of wine and women

ANAURUS A stream near Amphanae in Thessaly

ANDROMACHE. See prologue to Euripides' *Andromache*

ANDROMEDA Daughter of Cepheus, king of Aethiopia, and Cassiopia. Her boastful mother vaunted her daughter's beauty to excess and Poseidon dispatched a sea-monster to lay waste her country, which was to be preserved only if Andromeda were given up to the awful creature. She was chained to a rock, but Perseus found her and rescued her She was the heroine of a tragedy by Euripides, one of his most popular, in which the famous echo scene, parodied in *The Thesmophoriazusae,* was incorporated Originally it seems to have consisted of a solo lyric by Andromeda with responses by Echo

ANDROS A large island in the Aegean, southeast of Euboea

ANTHRACYLLUS Imaginary name of an Acharnian It contains the Greek word *anthrax,* "charcoal"

ANTIGONE See Introduction to Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus.*

ANTILOCHUS. A Greek hero in the *Iliad,* the son of Nestor

ANTIPHON An Athenian, famous for his poverty and his ravenous appetite; the orator of this name cannot be the person to whom Aristophanes refers.

ANTISTHENES. One of the most constipated men in Athens in the early fourth century; he was also a miser.

AORIA. An old name for Boeotia.

APATURIA. An Athenian festival concerned mainly with matters pertaining to the tribal survivals in the organization of the state. The name suggests the Greek word *apate,* "fraud"

APHRODITE The Greek goddess of love. Her cult was practised chiefly in Cyprus; hence she is called Cypris Other seats of her worship were Cythera and Paphos.

APIAN An older equivalent of Argive.

APIDANUS A river in Thessaly.

APODRASIPPIDES. A comic name, formed from the Greek words *apodranai,* "to run away" and *hippos,* "horse"

APOLLO Often called Phoebus In tragedy he is usually the god of healing, of prophecy, and of music Notable points in connection with him are: his building of the Trojan walls with Poseidon; his consistent support of Troy in the Trojan War; his unusual gift of prophecy to Cassandra.

ARACHNE. A mountain in Argolis.

ARCADIA. Anglicized into Arcady. The mountainous central region of the Peloponnesus, suited only to stock-raising. The god Pan was extensively worshipped there A later and romantic age idealized the pastoral life of Arcadia into what has ever since been connoted by the name

ARCHEDEMUS A demagogue, who initiated the prosecution of the Generals, after Arginusae

ARCHEPTOLEMUS An Athenian politician of conservative sentiments who had endeavoured to effect peace in 425, but was defeated by the vehement oratory of Cleon In later years he became definitely anti-democratic in his views, and we find him supporting the counter-revolution of 411. The restoration of the democracy brought a

trial for treason, a condemnation, and the death penalty.

ARCHON. The title of nine Athenian magistrates. The word means "ruler" The functions of the archons were mainly judicial and religious in the fifth and fourth centuries, but in earlier times they had held the supreme power in the state.

ARCTURUS. A star, whose morning rising in September indicated the vintage season, and the time when the cattle came down from their upland pastures

ARES. The Greek god of war The Areopagus at Athens was often called, by a doubtful etymology, the Hill of Ares

ARGADES. The name of a legendary Attic tribe, so called after a son of Ion

ARGINUSAE Three islands off the Asia Minor coast, opposite Mitylene The greatest naval battle of the Peloponnesian War took place here in 406 and the Athenian fleet won a brilliant victory, but the commanding officers either because of a storm or in a moment of neglgence, failed to pick up the men who were left on the disabled ships or were in the sea, and when they returned to Athens they were condemned to death. The incident is full of strange and unexplained factors, and we can never hope to understand it fully

ARGIVES Inhabitants of Argos, or Greeks generally.

ARGO. The name of the ship in which Jason and his heroic crew set out to fetch the Golden Fleece

ARGOLIS. Often Anglicized into The Argolid The later and more restricted name for the region of the Peloponnesus in which the town of Argos was situated, roughly the northeast corner

ARGOS A city in the northeast corner of the Peloponnesus; also the region in which this city was situated, The Argolid This region was one of the centers of the Achaean or Mycenaean civilization and plays a large rôle in Greek mythological history. In later historical times Argos was often at war with Sparta, and in the Peloponnesian War she played a clever and generally neutral game, profiting immensely from the conflict between the chief states of Greece On occasion she sided definitely with Athens, but was never of any great or permanent use to her.

ARGUS 1 The name of an early king of Argos. 2. The name of the builder of the ship Argo. 3 Most frequently a son of Earth, endowed with a hundred eyes and thus proverbial for vigilance It was he whom Hera set to watch over Io, and he was finally slain by Hermes at the command of Zeus; his eyes were then transferred to the tail of the peacock

ARIADNE. Daughter of Minos and Pasiphae She fell in love with Theseus, was deserted by him on the island of Naxos, where Dionysus found her

ARIGNOTUS A popular and talented harp-player, son of Automenes and brother of the pervert Ariphrades.

ARIMASPI. A people who supposedly dwelt in the north of Scythia

ARIPHRADES. A sexual pervert, the black sheep in the family of Automenes

ARISTIDES An Athenian, surnamed The Just. He is typical of the men of old whom Aristophanes so greatly admires; he had fought at Marathon in 490 and was one of the commanders of the fleet of the Delian Confederacy in 477; he played a great part in the organization of the Confederacy in its early years.

ARISTOGITON. One of the Tyrant-slayers, see Harmodius

ARISTOMACHE. "Best in the fight."

ARISTYLLUS. A sexual pervert in the manner of Ariphrades In *Plutus* (314) there is the usual pun on the two meanings of *choiros*, "sow" and "female genitalia"

ARTEMIS Daughter of Zeus and Leto, twin sister of Apollo, born at Delos, the virgin goddess of the hunt, also identified with the Moon; protectress

of animals and especially of their young, she was also thought to preside over human childbirth At Tauris human sacrifices were made to a goddess whom the Greeks called Artemis, see also BRAURON.

ARTEMISIA. The queen of Halicarnassus under Xerxes, who aided him in his expedition against Greece in 480 and fought bravely and not too intelligently at Salamis.

ARTEMISIUM. A promontory at the northern end of the island of Euboea, in 480 the Greek fleet had won a naval battle against the Persians there.

ARTEMO. Anacreon had written satirically about a man of this name calling him *periphoretos,* "carried around," perhaps because he was wont to ride in a litter and *poneros,* "a scoundrel" Aristophanes has combined the two epithets and dubs Cratinus a *periponeros Artemon,* "an especially knavish Artemo," meaning, presumably, to impute to him all of the vices which characterized the Anacreontic original.

ASCLEPIUS. A son of Apollo who learned to heal the sick and revive the dead, slain by Zeus; he was later deified and became the god of medicine.

ASOPUS. A river in Boeotia.

ASPASIA A Milesian woman of great charm and intelligence, who was the mistress of Pericles

ASTYANAX Son of Hector and Andromache

ATALANTA. An Arcadian maiden, the mother of Parthenopaeus She selected her husband, usually said to be Melanion, because he vanquished her in a foot-race.

ATE Daughter of Eris and Zeus, an ancient goddess, who led men into rash actions

ATHAMAS. In a tragedy by Sophocles called *Athamas* this king of Orchomenus was brought in with a chaplet on his head, about to be sacrificed

ATHENE Also called Pallas, a virgin goddess, daughter of Zeus, special protectress of Athens. Although regularly thought of as a warrior goddess, she was also the patroness of peaceful arts and of wisdom Her epithet Polias means "guardian of cities"

ATHMONIAN DEME Noted for its vineyards.

ATHOS. A mountain on a peninsula which projects from Chalcidice in Macedonia.

ATLAS. A Titan who was condemned to hold the heavens on his shoulders. The name is also given to the mountain range of northwestern Africa

ATREIDAE. A patronymic referring to Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus.

ATREUS. See Introduction to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

AULIS A harbour in Boeotia from which the Greek expedition sailed against Troy

AURORA The goddess of the dawn.

AUTOMENES. Father of three sons, one of whom was a talented actor; his name is not known The other two were Arignotus and Ariphrades

AUTONOE Daughter of Cadmus, sister of Agave, and mother of Actaeon.

AXIOS A river in Thrace.

AZANIA. A part of Arcadia

BACCHIOS A name for Dionysus.

BACCHUS. Dionysus

BACIS. A famous Boeotian seer

BACTRIA. A far-eastern province of the Empires of the Persians and of Alexander.

BARATHRUM. A deep pit at Athens into which criminals were thrown

BARCAEAN A name derived from a region in northern Africa.

BASILEIA. "Sovereignty"

BATTUS. The founder of Cyrene, and the first ruler of that city. Many of his successors bore this same name Their wealth, derived from the exportation of silphium, was proverbially enormous.

BDELYCLEON "Hater of Cleon"

BELLEROPHON. The rider of the winged steed Pegasus, by whose aid he slew the Chimaera. See STHENOBOEA.

BELUS. See Introduction to Aeschylus' *The Suppliants.*

BISTONES. A people of Thrace.

BLEPSIDEMUS. "People-watcher," *i.e.*, Suspicious.

BOEBIAN. Referring to a lake in Thessaly.

BOIOTIA. A fertile region in Greece, northwest of Attica, allied with Sparta in the Peloponnesian War.

BOREAS. The North Wind.

BOSPHORUS. The channel between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmora

BRAGGARTIAN. The Greek is *Kompaseus,* formed as if it were a local adjective from the name of some deme.

BRASIDAS. The best general produced by Sparta in the earlier years of the Peloponnesian War. In 422 he lost his life at Amphipolis, just after winning a brilliant victory.

BRAURON. An Attic deme, site of the worship of the Tauric Artemis, introduced by Iphigenia. Here took place the *Brauronia,* a festival at which selected young girls acted as bears

BROMIUS. Dionysus

BULOMACHUS. "Desiring battle"

BUPALUS. See HIPPONAX

BUPHONIA The ritual slaughter of a bull at the Dipolia

BYBLINE. Mythical mountains in Africa

BYBLOS. A wine district in Thrace

BYRSINA. Comic name for Myrsina, mother of Hippias, with a pun on *byrsa,* "leather"

BYZANTIUM Captured by Cimon in 471

CADMUS. The legendary founder of Thebes. Hence the Thebans are often called Cadmeans.

CALCHAS Agamemnon's seer

CALLIAS Wealthy scion of an illustrious family, who squandered all his riches in extravagant living.

CALLICHORUS. A fountain near Eleusis

CALLIGENIA. Originally a name of Persephone; later that of one of her attendants; also that of the fourth day of the Thesmophoria.

CALLIMACHUS. A choregus who was very poor.

CALLISTO. An Arcadian nymph, beloved by Zeus, whom Hera in her jealousy caused to have slain.

CALYPSO. A nymph living on the island of Ogygia, with whom Odysseus remained for seven years on his journey home from Troy.

CAMARINA. A city in Sicily

CANEPHORUS. A basket-bearer. At the festivals of various divinities the sacred objects were carried in baskets, sometimes gilded, which young maidens from the best families bore on their heads.

CANNONUS The author of a law whereby a man accused of a crime against the state had to plead his case in chains before the people, but had the right to a separate trial

CANOBUS or CANOPUS A city on the coast of lower Egypt, in the Nile delta.

CANTHARUS. Greek *kantharos.* 1. The name of one of the harbours in the Piraeus 2. Also the word for dung-beetle and the name of a kind of boat used at Naxos

CAPANEUS. One of the seven Argive champions who attacked Thebes. Because of his boastful defiance, Zeus struck him with lightning as he was scaling the walls of Thebes

CAPHAREUS A rocky promontory on the southeast of Euboea

CAPNIUS. "Smoky."

CARCINUS. A tragic poet, who had three sons of very diminutive stature. One was named Xenocles; the names of the others are uncertain All three wrote tragedies and introduced an inordinate amount of new-fangled dancing into their productions The Greek *karkinos* also means "crab"

CARIA A country in the southwest of Asia Minor; the inhabitants seem to have been exceptionally stupid and coarse.

CARTHAGE A wealthy and powerful city on the northern coast of Africa, originally a Phoenician colony. The demagogue Hyperbolus had proposed an expedition against Carthage in 425 or earlier, and Alcibiades dreamed of

attacking this city as soon as Sicily had been conquered

CARYSTUS. A town in Euboea famous for its loose morals.

CASSANDRA. Daughter of Priam and Hecuba. She possessed the gift of prophecy from Apollo who ordained subsequently that no one should believe her. Cf Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

CASTALIA A fountain on Mt. Parnassus

CASTOR. See DIOSCURI.

CATAGELA. A comic name, formed from *Gela,* a town in Sicily, and the common prefix *kata-*, but the result is also a pun, for it suggests *katagelan,* "to laugh at."

CAUCASUS A range of mountains between the Black Sea and the Caspian

CAYSTER A river in Lydia.

CEBRIONES. One of the Titans

CECIDES. One of the earliest dithyrambic poets known to the ancients.

CECROPS. The legendary first king of Attica. The citadel of Athens was called Cecropia after him.

CELEUS Name of the son, and perhaps also of the father, of Triptolemus He had treated Demeter kindly when she was searching for Persephone

CEMOS. A comic name; the Greek *kemos* means "the funnel-shaped top of a voting-urn"

CENAEUM. The northwest promontory of Euboea, where there was a temple of Zeus.

CENCHREAE. A town in the Argolid

CENTAURS. A mythical race, half man and half horse, who supposedly dwelt in Thessaly.

CENTRAL HEARTH The Underworld Prytaneum.

CEPHALAE. An Attic deme; the Greek *kephale* also means "head"

CEPHALLENIA. A large island in the Ionian Sea, near Ithaca

CEPHEUS The father of Andromeda.

CEPHISOPHON A domestic slave of Euripides, whom Aristophanes accuses of composing parts of the dramatist's works.

CEPHISUS or CEPHISSUS A stream in Attica The god of the stream called Cephisus was an ancestor of Creusa.

CERAMICUS. The name of two sections of Athens. The one referred to in *The Frogs* (129) and *The Birds* (395) was an attractive suburb in which those who had given their lives for the state were buried. The one referred to in *The Knights* (772) was inside the city and famous for the number of prostitutes found there.

CERBERUS. A dog stationed at the entrance to Hades, to keep the living from getting in and the dead from getting out He was proverbially fierce and difficult to handle In *Peace* (313) the reference is to Cleon.

CEYX A king of Trachis who gave Heracles and Deianeira a home there

CHAEREPHON. 1. A disciple of Socrates, who was very pale and unhealthy-looking 2 A parasite in the late fourth century

CHAERIS A flute-player of little talent, who had the further habit of turning up uninvited. This latter characteristic is the point of the mention of him in *The Birds* (858).

CHALCIS. A Euboean city, on the Euripus So many colonies were sent out from Chalcis to the three-fingered Macedonian peninsula in the northern Aegean that that region was called Chalcidice The colonies there were mostly subject to Athens in the fifth century, but they frequently revolted

CHALYBES. A people who dwelt on the south shore of the Black Sea.

CHAONIANS A people living in Epirus, northwest of Greece In *The Knights* (78) there is a pun on the Greek word *chaein,* "to gape"

CHAOS. In the cosmogony of Hesiod the yawning and infinite abyss out of which all things developed. The word is related to the Greek word *chaein,* "to gape"

CHARITES. The Graces.

CHARMINUS An unsuccessful admiral, unequal to Nausimache, "Sea-fight"

CHARON The ferryman of the Styx.

CHARYBDIS. A monster who swallowed

down the waters of the sea thrice daily and thrice daily spewed them forth again. Opposite SCYLLA.

CHEIRON. The wisest of the Centaurs, son of Cronus and Philyra. He was the teacher of gods and heroes, most notably Achilles. He was slain by one of the poisoned arrows of Heracles.

CHERSONESE. The modern Gallipoli Peninsula.

CHIOS. A large island in the Aegean, conquered by the Persians in 494, later one of the most powerful and loyal of Athens' allies

CHOENIX. A Greek measure of capacity, about the same as a quart dry measure.

CHOLARGIAN DEME. Location unknown Pericles had belonged to it

CHOLLIDAN DEME. One of the rural demes of Attica.

CHOREGUS. The wealthy person whose duty it was to meet the expenses of the chorus in the dramatic and lyric spectacles of a given year He was expected to entertain the poet and the members of the chorus after the performance.

CHREMES. Character in *The Ecclesiazusae*. The name is very frequent in the Middle and the New Comedy, where it is always applied to a secondary character; it is thus one of the points in *The Ecclesiazusae* which reflect the fourth century.

CHRYSA. 1. Town in the Troad 2 Cf Introduction to Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.

CHRYSEIS. Agamemnon's favourite concubine at Troy.

CICYNNA. A rural deme in Attica

CILICIA. A district in the southeast of Asia Minor.

CILLICON. A man who had betrayed his native city to its enemy; the names are variously reported When he was asked what he had had in mind, he replied, "Nothing bad," and the remark became proverbial.

CIMMERII. A people who lived near the Caspian Sea.

CIMOLIAN CLAY. A sort of fuller's-earth, from Cimolus, a tiny island north of Melos.

CIMON. A great Athenian statesman and general in the period immediately following the Persian Wars. He was the leader of the conservative group, which had as one of its chief objectives the maintenance of friendship with Sparta.

CINESIAS. A popular dithyrambic poet, famous for his thinness and misbehaviour. He was reported to have smeared excrement on the statues of Hecate. The point of the jest in *The Frogs* (1437) is somewhat obscure

CIRCE. The daughter of the Sun, one of the sea-nymphs, who lived on an island and was highly skilled in magic. When Odysseus landed there she turned his companions into swine. The reference in *Plutus* (302ff) is to the famous fourth-century courtesan Lais of Corinth.

CISSEUS A king in Thrace, the father of Hecuba.

CISSIA. A region near Persia whose people were famed for their skill as professional mourners

CITHAERON. A range of mountains separating Boeotia from Megaris and Attica.

CLAUSIMACHUS. A comic name, formed from *klausai*, "to weep," and *mache*, "battle"

CLEALNETUS The father of Cleon, but the point of the reference in *The Knights* (574) has never been satisfactorily explained.

CLEOMENES. A king of Sparta, who in the sixth century twice invaded Attica. On the second occasion he was finally besieged in the Acropolis

CLEON. The most renowned of the Athenian demagogues A tanner by trade, he soon turned to politics, and from the death of Pericles in 429 to his own in 422 he was the most powerful man in Athens. Aristophanes constantly attacks his rapacity, sham patriotism, vulgarity, and jingoism; his status as a citizen is also questioned. For a de-

fense of the man, see Grote's *History of Greece*.

CLEONICE "Glorious victory."

CLEONYMUS. A large and gluttonous coward, who had once in battle thrown away his shield and fled. Aristophanes never let him forget it

CLEOPHON. A demagogue who violently opposed peace in the last years of the Peloponnesian War

CLEPSYDRA. 1. The water-clock which measured the time allowed for speeches in the law-courts 2 A spring on the Acropolis

CLIGENES A little known politician of demagogical aspirations

CLINIAS. The father of Alcibiades

CLISTHENES. Athens' most noted homosexual, at whom Aristophanes never tires of poking fun.

CLITOPHON A dilettante in philosophy.

CLOPIDIANS A comic name, formed after the analogy of Cropidians, from the deme Cropidae, with a pun on *klope*, "theft."

CNOSSUS The leading city of Crete, famed for the dances held in honour of Zeus and Apollo

COCYTUS. A river in the Underworld

COESYRA. A name frequently borne by the female children of the wealthy and noble family of the Alcmeonidae

COLACONYMUS A comic name, formed from Cleonymus, and *kolax*, "flatterer"

COLAENIS. Name under which Artemis was worshipped in the Attic deme Myrrhinous It is reported that this name was derived from Colaenus, an early king of Athens, who had built a temple to the goddess

COLCHIS A country at the extreme east of the Black Sea.

COLONUS. An Attic deme about a mile northwest from Athens It was the birthplace of Sophocles and the legendary tomb of Oedipus.

CONNAS. A flute-player. He is reported to have won many victories in the musical contests at the Olympic games, and later to have taken to drink, with the result that in his old age his trophies were his only possessions.

CONTHYLE. A deme in Attica.

COPAIC EELS These Boeotian delicacies came from Lake Copais.

CORA or CORE See PERSEPHONE.

CORCYRAEAN WINGS By these are meant whips, an article for which the island of Corcyra, the modern Corfu, was especially famous

CORDAX A dance, the precise nature of which is not known It seems to have been performed only in comedy

CORINTH. A city on the Isthmus, famous for its prostitutes.

CORYBANTES. Priests of Cybele, who worshipped her in orgiastic dances; they were supposed to be able to cure insanity

CORYCIA A nymph, from whom a cave on Mt Parnassus was named It was near the fountain of Castalia

COTTABUS The name of a convivial game which was very popular in Greece. There would seem to have been numerous varieties, but in all of them the fundamental point was to test one's skill in throwing wine from a cup into some other vessel at an agreed distance.

COTYLA A liquid measure, about half a pint The word means "cup"

CRANAUS The mythical founder of Athens

CRAPPER. The Greek is *epikechodos*, literally "one who has just defecated"; a lexicon usually quite staid astonishes us with "Shitterling"

CRATES A comic poet earlier than Aristophanes

CRATHIS A river in southern Italy, which made golden the hair of men and the fleece of sheep

CRATINUS. An older comic poet; in 423 he won the first prize and neatly turned the tables on Aristophanes, who had cast slurs on his senility the year before (*Knights* 526ff)

CREON 1. Brother of Jocasta 2 A legendary king of Corinth.

CRETE. A large island south of the Aegean, in the fifth century famous for

looseness of morals, but in the Heroic Age more highly respected.

CRISA. A town in Phocis.

CRONUS. Father of Hera, Poseidon, and Zeus. He was deprived of his throne by Zeus

CUROTROPHUS. An epithet of various divinities; it means "nourishing the young."

CYANEAN. See SYMPLEGADES.

CYBELE. An Asiatic goddess identified with Rhea. Her worship was wild and orgiastic in character, and hence it became closely connected with that of Dionysus.

CYCHREA An old name for Salamis

CYCLOPES One-eyed giants, assistants of Hephaestus, who were supposed to dwell likewise as shepherds in Sicily

CYCNORANIDAE. "Swan-frogs"

CYCNUS. A famous robber slain by Heracles.

CYDATHENAEA. An Attic deme, birthplace of Cleon and of Aristophanes

CYLLENE. A mountain in the Peloponnesus, sacred to Hermes.

CYNALOPEX Nickname of the brothel-keeper Philostratus, it means "dog-fox" The mention of the dog-fox in the oracle in *The Knights* (1067ff) immediately suggests Philostratus, and this passage may serve as an index to his character

CYNNA. One of the best known courtesans in Athens.

CYNTHUS A mountain in Delos, the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis.

CYPRIS. Aphrodite

CYPRUS. A large island in the Mediterranean, south of Cilicia

CYRENE 1 A city in northern Africa, west of Egypt 2 In Aristophanes, the name of a famous courtesan, perhaps of Corinthian origin, nicknamed *dodekamechanos* to indicate her mastery of no less than a dozen methods of making love.

CYRUS Founder of the Persian Empire.

CYTHERA An island off the southern tip of the Peloponnesus, famous for its worship of Aphrodite

CYZICENE YELLOW. No such dye is known to have existed, but the inhabitants of Cyzicus had a reputation for cowardice and effeminacy and the name suggests the Greek word *chezein*, "to defecate" It may be that we should correct the text in such a way as to get the comic name "Chezicene."

DAEDALUS. A mythical person who was supposed to have made the first advances in the arts of sculpture and architecture

DANAAN. Equivalent of Greek.

DANAE. Daughter of Acrisius, king of Argos, who confined her in a brazen tower, since an oracle had told him that she would bear a child who would kill him. Zeus visited her in a shower of gold, and she gave birth to Perseus Acrisius shut mother and child in a chest, cast it into the sea, but both were rescued

DANAI Descendants of Danaus Used frequently for the Greeks in general

DANAUS. See Introduction to Aeschylus' *The Suppliants*.

DARDANUS. Mythical ancestor of the Trojans. Hence Dardanian is the equivalent of Trojan

DARIUS King of Persia, father of Xerxes.

DATIS. A Persian name The man referred to in *Peace* (289ff) is otherwise unknown; he cannot be the famous commander at Marathon His remark contains a mistake in Greek, but this can hardly be the whole point of its citation.

DAULIS or DAULIA. An ancient town in Phocis

DEIANEIRA See Sophocles' *The Trachiniae*.

DELOS. A small island in the Aegean, birthplace of Apollo and Artemis

DELPHI. A town in Phocis, site of a famous oracular shrine of Apollo and of the Pythian Games

DEME. The term applied to the smallest divisions of Attica, corresponding to wards or townships in modern states

DEMETER. Goddess of agriculture, mother of Persephone.

DEMOLOGOCLEON. A comic name meaning "mob-orator Cleon" and applied, or misapplied, to Bdelycleon in *The Wasps* (343).

DEMOS. 1. The Greek word for "people" and the name of a character in *The Knights* who is designed to personify the Athenian populace 2 The name of a young man of great beauty, the son of Pyrilampes and stepbrother of Plato

DEMOSTHENES. A distinguished Athenian general It was he who first attacked Pylos, but Cleon stole his victory from under his nose

DEMOSTRATUS The man who had first proposed the ill-fated Sicilian expedition; he was nicknamed "mad ox"

DEO Another name for Demeter.

DEXITHEUS A talented performer on the lyre.

DIAGORAS. The Melian, an Ionian philosopher, the earliest known atheist. Because of his doctrines a price was put on his head This is the man to whom reference is made in *The Birds* (1073) and *The Clouds* (830); the poet mentioned in *The Frogs* (320) was a different person

DICAEOPOLIS "Honest citizen"

DICASTS. Athenian jurymen.

DICTYNNA. Another name for Artemis

DIITREPHES. A man who had become wealthy through the manufacture of wicker flasks; the handles of these were called *ptera*, "wings."

DIOCLES A Megarian hero

DIOMLAN FEAST. A festival held in honour of Heracles in the Attic deme of Diomea.

DIOMEDES. Son of Tydeus A Greek hero in the Trojan War.

DIOMIALAZON "Diomean boaster"

DIONYSIA Festivals of Dionysus

DIONYSIUS The great tyrant of Syracuse in the fourth century.

DIONYSUS Son of Zeus and Semele, god of wine and of the productive power of nature, patron of drama at Athens His worship was orgiastic and when first introduced into Greece was strongly opposed by the staid. He had an oracular shrine in Thrace.

DIOPITHES. A soothsayer given to prophetic seizures of such violence that even the ancients doubted his sanity.

DIOSCURI Castor and Pollux, sons of Leda and Tyndareus, or, according to another tradition, of Leda and Zeus They were hence brothers of Helen. Castor was famed for his skill in dealing with horses, and Pollux for his skill in boxing Both were regarded as protectors of sailors.

DIPOLIA. An ancient festival of Zeus Polieus

DIRCE. Wife of Lycus, an ancient king of Thebes A famous fountain there took its name from her

DIRPHYS A town in Euboea

DITHYRAMB A form of choral lyric poetry, the early history and precise nature of which are highly uncertain By the end of the fifth century, the dithyramb was remarkable chiefly for its bombastic and far-fetched phraseology.

DITYLAS. A Scythian name, like the Sceblyas and Pardocas which immediately follow it.

DODONA An ancient oracle of Zeus in Epirus. The sounds made by the wind in the sacred oaks were interpreted by the priests

DORO. "Bribery"

DORUS. Son of Xuthus and Creusa. In the legends he was regarded as the founder of the race of the Dorians

DRYAS Father of the Thracian king Lycurgus

DUNGTOWNITE The Greek is *Kopreios*, which is formed like the name of some deme, but from *kopros*, "ordure."

ECBATANA A great city in Persia.

ECHIDNA A monster, half woman and half serpent, the mother of Cerberus.

ECHINUS. 1 A town in Thessaly. 2. In *Lysistrata* (1169f) there seems to be a series of plays on geographical names with reference to the sexual parts of the heroine; the word *echi-*

nos had various meanings, amongst which one may note the following "Hedgehog," "sea-urchin," "vase," "the prickly husk of a chestnut."

ECHION. Father of Pentheus.

ELECTRA. Daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

ELECTRYON. Father of Alcmena Amphitryon was exiled from Mycenae for killing him

ELEUSIS A town near Athens, where the mysteries in honour of Demeter and Persephone were celebrated

ELEUTHERAE A town in Attica near the borders of Boeotia

ELEVEN. A group of Athenian officials who had the function of a modern Chief of Police; they were also the executioners in cases of capital punishment

ELYMNIUM A small place in the neighbourhood of Oreus

EMPUSA A terrible spectre haunting lonely places at night and associated with Hecate. The Empusa had the power of taking on any shape or likeness.

ENCELADUS. One of the giants who made war on gods. Zeus killed him and buried him under Mt Aetna.

ENGLOTTOGASTORS A comic name, containing the words *glotta*, "tongue" and *gaster*, "belly," and denoting men who live by their tongues, *i e*, the grafting politicians of Athens

ENYALIUS. Ares

EPAPHUS See Introduction to Aeschylus' *The Suppliants*

EPEIOS The builder of the wooden horse at Troy.

EPICRATES An Athenian who had grown so imposing a beard that he was nicknamed *sakesphoros*, "shield-bearer"

EPIDAURUS. A town in Argolis on the Saronic gulf.

EPIGONUS. A notorious and extraordinarily effeminate homosexual.

EPOPS The Greek means "hoopoe," but in translating it is more convenient to take *epops* as a proper name acquired by Tereus after his transformation.

ERASINIDES. One of the Arginusae generals who were put to death.

ERASINUS A river in the Peloponnesus

EREBUS The darkness surrounding the Underworld

ERECHTHEUS A legendary king of Athens The Athenians were often called Erechtheidae after him.

ERICHTHONIUS. Another name for Erechtheus

ERIDANUS A river in Italy, later supposed to be the Po

ERINYES. The Furies See Introduction to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

EROS The god of love

ERYMANTHUS A mountain in Arcadia, the haunt of the savage boar slain by Heracles

ERYTHIA. A small island on which Gades was built. Here dwelt the monster Geryon.

ERYTHRAE A town near Cithaeron.

ETEOCLES Son of Oedipus and Jocasta Cf Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, note 2.

ETEOCLUS One of the seven Argive champions who attacked Thebes.

ETRURIA A country in central Italy

EUATHLUS. A glib and scoundrelly orator

EUBOEA A long and narrow island northeast of the Attic and Boeotian coasts, subject to Athens

EUBULE. "Good councillor"

EUCRATES One of the earliest demagogues, a dealer in oakum The man mentioned in *Lysistrata* (103) was a brother of Nicias.

EUDEMUS. A dealer in magic charms and rings

EUELPIDES "Hopeful."

EUERGIDES "Benefactor."

EUMELUS Son of Admetus and Alcestis

EUMENIDES "Benevolent," a euphemism for the Erinyes In tragedy they are usually called simply "The Goddesses"

EUMOLPUS The mythical founder of the Eleusinian mysteries. His family, the Eumolpidae, were the hereditary priests of the mysteries.

EUPHEMIUS. An extremely abject flatterer.

EUPHORIDES "Good Carrier" (of charcoal?).

EUPOLIS. A comic poet, one of the greatest; he seems to have been but a little older than Aristophanes

EURIPIDES. The man referred to in *Ecclesiazusae* (825ff) is probably the son of the dramatist.

EURIPUS. The channel between Euboea and Boeotia.

EUROTAS. The chief river in Laconia, on whose banks Sparta was situated

EURYCLES. A soothsayer who had the knack of making his voice seem to come out of his belly

EURYSACES Son of Ajax and Tecmessa The name comes from an adjective which means "with a broad shield"

EURYSTHEUS King of Argos, enemy and master of Heracles to whom he assigned the twelve labours

EURYTUS 1 King of Oechalia and father of Iole See Sophocles' *The Trachiniae*. 2. A chief of the Epeians.

EUTHYMENES The archon in 437.

EUXINE The Black Sea

EVADON A pauper whose clothes were so worn that he might as well not have had any on

EVENUS A river in Aetolia.

EVIUS A name for Dionysus, derived like the Evivus and Evoe which follow it, from the cries of the Bacchantes

EXECESTIDES A Carian who had palmed himself off as an Athenian citizen; this necessitated the invention of imaginary ancestors He is also reported to have been a skilled lyre-player, who had won prizes at various games

FLARING The Greek is *hypodedios*, "one who has got frightened"

FEAST OF CUPS. A part of the Dionysia, in which there was held a great public banquet to which each citizen brought his own provisions

FEAST OF POTS A part of the Dionysia, taking place on the same day as the Feast of Cups; it involved a drinking competition. In later times the two feasts were celebrated on successive days

FLITTOTHRATT. An onomatopoeic word designed to imitate the twanging of strings on a lyre

GANYMEDES. A handsome Trojan youth whom Zeus made cup-bearer to the gods.

GARGETTIUS. An Attic deme northeast of Athens The body of Eurystheus was supposed to be buried there, and in later times this deme was the birthplace of the great philosopher Epicurus

GELA. A city in Sicily.

GELEON The eldest son of Ion, after whom a legendary Attic tribe was named

GENERAL See STRATEGUS

GENETYLLIS One of a number of minor deities, the Genetyllides, pictured as companions of Aphrodite, they presided over the act of generation

GERAESTUS A town on the southwest tip of Euboea

GERITOTHEODORUS. A comic name, compounded from two regular names, Geres and Theodorus

GERYON A triple-bodied monster whose cattle Heracles carried off

GLANIS A soothsayer, quite fictitious, the elder brother of Bacis

GLAUCETES A glutton, particularly fond of fish He was nicknamed *Psetta*, "turbot"

GLAUCUS A sea god

GLYCE "Sweet"

GNIDUS A city in Asia Minor.

GNOMON A primitive form of sundial, in which the length rather than the direction of the shadow told the time; a ten-foot shadow means shortly before sunset

GOOD GENIUS. The divine and special comrade and protector of individuals and communities

GORGIAS A brilliant sophist and rhetorician from Leontini in Sicily, he may have had non-Greek ancestry

GORGONS. Three horrible sisters, of whom Medusa was the most renowned in mythology. They had serpents on their heads instead of hair, and were endowed with wings, claws, and enormous teeth Anyone who looked at Medusa's head was turned to stone.

GORGOPIS. A bay near Corinth

GRAEAE. Three old women, who possessed but one eye and one tooth, which they could loan to one another.

HADES The god of the Underworld. It is also used as a name for the Underworld.

HAEMON A Theban, the son of Creon

HALIMUS An Attic deme, on the shore, not far from the Piraeus, famous as the birthplace of the historian Thucydides

HALIRROTHIUS Son of Poseidon, who was slain by Ares. Ares was tried for the murder on a hill in Athens, which hence was called the Areopagus.

HALYS A great river in Asia Minor which empties into the Black Sea.

HARMODIUS. A youth in sixth-century Athens, whose remarkable beauty attracted the notice and elicited the advances of Hipparchus, the younger brother of the reigning tyrant Hippias. The natural jealousy of Aristogiton, the lover of Harmodius, was intensified and embittered by the arrogance of his rival's approaches, and the two friends eventually decided that with a single action they should free their city of tyranny and avenge their private insults They laid their plans with great care, but the necessity of secrecy and their own impatience of delay prevented them from enlisting an adequate number of supporters, and a misunderstood intimacy of one of their associates with Hippias prematurely precipitated the coup. The liberators succeeded in killing only Hipparchus, but the incident had the effect of making Hippias so suspicious and so vindictive that popular sentiment finally turned against him, and he was expelled, not without a number of initial difficulties and the ultimate intervention of Sparta. Harmodius and Aristogiton immediately became and forever remained the dear heroes of all Athenians of anti-tyrannical opinion, and the scolium, or drinking-song, which celebrated their inspiring exploit was one of the most frequently rendered of such compositions.

HARMONIA. Daughter of Ares and Aphrodite, who became the wife of Cadmus.

HARPIES. Monstrous birds with heads of maidens.

HEBE. The goddess of youth, who married Heracles after he was received among the gods

HEBRUS. The principal river in Thrace

HECATE. A confusing divinity, identified with the Moon, Artemis, and Persephone, and invoked by sorcerers She is the great sender of visions, of madness, and of sudden terror. Sometimes she is called one of the Titans, sometimes, as Artemis, the daughter of Leto.

HECTOR Son of Priam and Hecuba, the leading hero of the Trojans

HECUBA. Queen of Troy, the wife of Priam.

HEGELOCHUS. An Athenian actor who, in a performance of Euripides' *Orestes* had made a slight and fatal slip in diction; he had pronounced *galen' horo* (*galena* with the final *a* elided) so that it sounded like *galen horo* (*galen* without any *a* to elide) This created a ridiculous line, for instead of saying, "After the storm I perceive the calm," he tragically declaimed, "After the storm I perceive the cat"

HELEN. Daughter of Zeus and Leda, sister of the Dioscuri Paris stole her from her husband Menelaus and thus precipitated the Trojan War See Introduction to Euripides' *Helen,* and the close of his *Orestes.*

HELENUS. Son of Priam and Hecuba, noted for his powers of prophecy.

HELIAEA. The democratic courts of Athens. The jurors were chosen by lot from all classes, and were paid three obols a day for their services

HELIASTS. Jurymen in the Heliaea.

HELICON. A celebrated range of mountains in Boeotia, sacred to Apollo and the Muses.

HELIOS. The god of the Sun.

HELLE. A heroine of mythology who fell into the straits which were thereafter named the Hellespont.

HELLEBORE. The ancient cure for insanity.

HELLESPONT. The straits of the Dardanelles.

HEPHAESTUS God of fire and metallurgy, associated with all volcanic places, particularly Lemnos and Aetna.

HERA. Sister and wife of Zeus A goddess associated with Argos, who is portrayed as jealous and hostile to all the women loved by Zeus, and to his irregular offspring.

HERACLES. A Greek hero, later deified, son of Zeus and Alcmena. Through the trickery of the jealous Hera Eurystheus was given power over Heracles and the hero was forced to exert his great strength in the performance of labours for his master (See Sophocles, *The Trachiniae*, 1090ff. and Euripides, *Heracles*, 349ff.)

HERMAE. Busts of Hermes with the phallus in front. One night, just before the sailing of the Sicilian Expedition, the Hermae were all mutilated, and the populace was filled with superstitious dread.

HERMAEAN (mount). Probably the northeast promontory of Lemnos.

HERMES. Son of Zeus and Maia, a god of various attributes. Messenger of the Olympians, he was also the guide of the souls of the dead. Trickery and thievery were his innate talents As bringer of good luck he was called Eriunian.

HERMIONE. Daughter of Menelaus and Helen.

HESIOD. A famous early Greek poet, born at Ascra in Boeotia, probably toward the end of the ninth century; he is the author of *Works and Days*, a didactic poem which gives a great deal of sound and practical advice on agriculture.

HESIONE. 1. Daughter of Oceanus and wife of Prometheus. 2. Daughter of Laomedon, who was captured by Heracles and given to Telamon, by whom she became the mother of Teucer.

HESPERUS. The evening star

HESTIA. The goddess of the hearth, to whom the first prayers or libations were offered.

HIERO. A crier at public auctions.

HIERONYMUS. A poet with long hair, the son of Xenophantes. The Hieronymus referred to in *The Acharnians* (389) may be the same poet, and the mention of the helmet of Hades may be a jibe at his hair, but it seems farfetched. The man of this name that we find in *The Ecclesiazusae* (201) was not a poet at all, but merely a very stupid person whom the Athenian populace was, or is alleged to have been, misguided enough to regard as wise.

HIPPALECTRYON. Anglicized hippalector, a fabulous monster mentioned in the lost *Myrmidons* of Aeschylus Literally the word means "horse-rooster."

HIPPARCH. A cavalry officer.

HIPPIAS. A tyrant of Athens, see HARMODIUS. In *The Wasps* (502) there is a pun on *hippiazein*, "to make love horse-fashion."

HIPPOCRATES. An Athenian whose three sons were proverbially stupid; the family appears to have lived in a frightful hovel.

HIPPODAMIA. Daughter of Oenomaus and wife of Pelops.

HIPPODAMUS. The father of Archeptolemus.

HIPPOLYTUS. See Introduction to Euripides' *Hippolytus*.

HIPPOMEDON. One of the seven Argive champions who attacked Thebes.

HIPPONAX. An iambic poet of the sixth century, born at Ephesus, but banished about 540. He took up residence

at Clazomenae, and here was insulted or caricatured by the sculptor Bupalus, about whom he then wrote such scurrilous verses that the wretched man is reported to have found life no longer endurable and accordingly to have committed suicide.

HOMOLE A haunt of the Centaurs in Thessaly.

HOPLETES. The name of a legendary Attic tribe, so called after a son of Ion.

HOPLITES. The heavy-armed soldiers in Greek armies.

HORAE. The Seasons.

HYACINTHUS. A Spartan youth, loved and accidentally killed by Apollo.

HYADES. A contellation. The name literally means "The Rainers."

HYDRA. A monster slain by Heracles whose blood he used to poison his arrows.

HYLLUS. Son of Heracles and Deianeira.

HYMEN. The god of marriage. The *Hymen Hymenaeus* was the song sung at weddings.

HYPERBOLUS. An Athenian demagogue, whom Aristophanes constantly attacks. He had been a seller of lamps It was he that proposed an expedition against Carthage In general he seems to have been, in the eyes of the comic poet, a sort of poor imitation of Cleon and there is little that is cast up at him which is not also found in the attacks on Cleon.

HYSIAE. A town near Cithaeron.

IACCHUS. A son of Zeus and Demeter, partly identified with Dionysus.

IASO Goddess of healing.

IBYCUS. A choral lyric poet of the sixth century, born at Rhegium in Italy. Erotic motifs seem to have played a large rôle in his works, which have not come down to us

ICARIAN The sea around the island of Icaria in the Aegean.

IDA A mountain in the Troad, the scene of the judgment of Paris.

ILION An alternate name for Troy.

ILITHYIA. Goddess of childbirth.

ILLYRIANS. A savage and rude people, who inhabited what is now Albania

INACHUS. Son of Oceanus and Tethys, the father of Io He was the first king of Argos, and gave his name to the river Inachus there.

INFORMERS. Political blackmailers.

INO. Daughter of Cadmus, with whom Athamas had illicit relations Hera drove him mad and he slew one of his and Ino's children Ino took the other and threw herself into the sea; both were changed into marine deities, Ino becoming Leucothea, or Leucothoe, and the son, Melicertes, Palaemon.

IO. Daughter of Inachus. See Introduction to Aeschylus' *The Suppliants.*

IOLAS. Boeotian dialect form of Iolaus.

IOLCUS. A town in Thessaly where Pelias and Jason lived.

IOLE. Daughter of Eurytus. See Sophocles' *The Trachiniae.*

ION. 1. Son of Apollo and Creusa, legendary ancestor of the Ionians. 2 A fifth-century tragic poet, from Chios.

IONIA. The fringe of Greek settlements on the coast of Asia Minor, from Miletus to Phocaea. The Ionic dialect was also spoken in the northern islands and in Euboea. The Ionians were regarded as cowardly and lascivious by the other Greeks

IOPHON Son of Sophocles; it was suspected that the father was partly responsible for the virtues of the son's compositions

IPHIANASSA. See Sophocles' *Electra,* note 1.

IPHIGENIA. Daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, sacrificed by her father at Aulis, that the Greek expedition might sail for Troy

IPHITUS See Sophocles' *The Trachiniae,* (248ff).

IRIS The messenger goddess.

ISMENE Daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta.

ISMENIAS. A noble Theban name

ISMENUS A river near Thebes, by whose side was a temple of Apollo

ISTER The Danube

ISTHMIAN GAMES. A great national

festival, held every other year, respectively one and three years after the Olympics.

ISTHMUS. The narrow neck of land connecting the Peloponnesus with northern Greece. The chief city on the Isthmus was Corinth and the ability to send ships westward to Sicily and Italy and eastward to Asia Minor was mainly responsible for the commercial supremacy of Corinth in the early ages of Greek history. The jest in *The Thesmophoriazusae* (648) refers to the Corinthian habit of hauling their ships over the short stretch of land that lay between the two seas.

ITHACA. An island in the Ionian Sea, the home of Odysseus.

ITYLUS. See ITYS.

ITYS. Son of Tereus and Procne, slain by his mother. In a parallel myth his name is Itylus.

IXION. A king of the Lapithae, whom Zeus befriended. Ixion treacherously attempted to win the love of Hera, and was punished by being chained forever to a wheel in the Underworld which never ceased revolving.

JASON. A Greek hero, the leader of the Argonauts, and husband of Medea.

JOCASTA. Wife of Laius, and mother of Oedipus.

KING. The ruler of the Persian Empire was *The* King for the Greeks, he is usually called The Great King. He was the only Persian who might wear his tiara straight. His wealth was proverbially enormous and he became a symbol of incredible magnificence. The term "King's Eye" was applied to a number of officials who constituted a sort of royal intelligence service and kept the monarch informed of what was going on throughout his vast realm.

KNIGHTS. In early Attic history, the second highest income bracket; later the cavalry arm, 1000 in number, 100 from each tribe. These men were chosen from the two highest income brackets; they were traditionally conservative, and they had actively opposed Cleon.

KORE. See PERSEPHONE.

LABDACUS. A king of Thebes, the father of Laius. The name Labdacidae is often given to his descendants.

LABES. The Aexonian dog, accused of theft in *The Wasps* of Aristophanes. The name suggests both the Greek *labein*, "to take" and Laches.

LACEDAEMON. See SPARTA.

LACHES. An Athenian general accused by Cleon of embezzlements on an expedition to Sicily in 427. The old man of this name in *Lysistrata* cannot be the same person.

LACONIA. A region in the southeastern Peloponnesus, chief town Sparta.

LACRATIDES. An Acharnian; a man of this name is reported to have been one of the accusers of Pericles.

LAERTES. Father of Odysseus.

LAISPODIAS. An Athenian general who had also served as an ambassador.

LAIS. A famous Corinthian courtesan.

LAIUS. A king of Thebes, the husband of Jocasta, and father of Oedipus by whom he was killed.

LAMACHUS. An Athenian general, one of the most dependable soldiers that the city possessed.

LAMIA. One of a species of fabulous and formidable monsters, endowed by ancient superstition with a variety of forms, but not often with testicles. Usually pictured as female, they had the blood-thirsty manners of a vampire. An aetiological myth related that there had once been a queen of Libya named Lamia, beloved of Zeus, hated of Hera, and by her robbed of her children, in return for which injury the queen took to stealing the offspring of others and to murdering them. She had become a favourite subject of bawdy folktales.

LAMIAS. The keeper of the public prison. His name suggests Lamia. Compare also *Wasps* (1177).

LAMPON. An eminent diviner.

LAOMEDON. King of Troy, father of Priam. Apollo and Poseidon built the walls of Troy, but Laomedon refused to pay them his promised reward Poseidon therefore sent a sea-monster against the city to which the Trojans from time to time were compelled to sacrifice a maiden Heracles killed the monster, but Laomedon again treacherously failed to pay a promised reward Heracles therefore took an expedition against Troy, killed Laomedon, and gave his daughter Hesione to Telamon

LAPITHAE. A mythical people of Thessaly. At the wedding of Peirithous, a bloody battle arose between the Lapithae and the Centaurs, a subject found frequently in Greek art.

LARISSA. A town in eastern Thessaly

LASUS A famous lyric poet, contemporary of Simonides

LAURIUM The Attic deme in which the silver-mines were located. The "owls of Laurium" are coins made from Laurian metal and stamped with the Athenian emblem, the owl

LEDA. Wife of Tyndareus, King of Sparta, by whom or by Zeus she became the mother of the Dioscuri, Clytemnestra, and Helen The legends record that Zeus visited her in the form of a swan

LEITUS The commander of the Boeotians in the Trojan War.

LEMNOS A large volcanic island in the Aegean A myth told that the Lemnian women had murdered all their husbands

LENAEA One of the festivals of Dionysus The name means "Feast of Vats."

LEOGORAS One of Athens' greatest gourmets

LEONIDAS The Spartan commander at Thermopylae

LEOTROPHIDES A poet of such slender and delicate physique that in later ages he became proverbial for these qualities

LEPREUM A town in Elis. It is dragged in by the heels in *The Birds* (149) merely to build up a gibe at Melanthius, who was a leper.

LERNA. A district in Argolis where Heracles slew the Hydra.

LESBOS. A large island off the Asia Minor coast. The word Lesbian had in ancient times sometimes the same connotations that it does today

LETHE. A river in Hades, from which the souls of the departed drank and were rendered quite oblivious of their past experiences

LETO. Mother of Apollo and Artemis, hence, occasionally, also of the Moon and of Hecate

LEUCADIA. An island in the Ionian Sea

LEUCE. A strip of sand off the mouth of the Borysthenes (the Dnieper).

LEUCIPPUS. His daughters were priestesses of Athene and Artemis

LEUCOLOPHUS In *The Frogs* of Aristophanes (1513) the father of Adimantus. In *The Ecclesiazusae* (645) an unknown man, who cannot be the same as the father of Adimantus

LEUCOTHOE A sea goddess See INO.

LIBYA Equivalent of Africa.

LICYMNIUS The half-brother of Alcmena, who was killed by Tlepolemus, the son of Heracles In *The Birds* (1242) the reference is to a tragedy of this name by Euripides, in which some person or thing was consumed by lightning.

LIMNA. A sea-coast town in Troezen

LINUS The personification of a dirge or lamentation

LIPSYDRION A locality, not a deme, in Attica, above Parnes, which was fortified by the exiled nobles of the family of the Alcmeonidae, but in vain, for the partisans of Hippias successfully besieged the place Aristophanes is very fond of having his old warriors reminisce about events which took place long before they were born, and the reference to Lipsydrion (*Lysistrata*, 665) is one of the most remarkable examples of this, for the date of the siege is somewhere between 514 and 510

LOCRIS. 1 A district in Greece just north

of Boeotia. 2. A district just north of the Gulf of Corinth.

LOXIAS. Alternate name for Apollo.

LYCABETTUS. A mountain in Attica.

LYCAON. Son of Ares with whom Heracles fought.

LYCEAN. "Light-bringing," an epithet of Apollo. The Lyceum in Athens was a gymnasium in the vicinity of the temple of Lycean Apollo.

LYCIA. A small district in southern Asia Minor.

LYCOMEDE. Achilles' father-in-law

LYCON. An indigent politician, in 399 one of the accusers of Socrates. His wife, Rhodia, was a woman of notorious infidelity.

LYCURGUS. 1. A mythical king in Thrace who persecuted Dionysus. For this act he was driven mad by the gods. 2. Probably the grandfather of the fourth-century orator, Lycurgus.

LYCUS. A mythical tyrant of Thebes, who sought to kill the children of Heracles. Also the patron hero of the Athenian law-courts.

LYDIA. A country in southwestern Asia Minor. Many Athenian slaves were Lydians.

LYNCEUS. A mythological hero, noted for his extraordinary keenness of vision.

LYSICLES. A demagogue before Cleon; he had been a sheep-dealer. After Pericles' death he married Aspasia, but shortly thereafter lost his life in battle.

LYSICRATES. An Athenian general, reported to have been a thief and a rogue (*Birds* 513). The man mentioned in *The Ecclesiazusae* (630 and 736) as possessing an ugly nose (the Athenian Bardolph?) and dyeing his hair raven black may or may not be the same person.

LYSIMACHA. "Dissolver of conflict."

LYSISTRATA. "Disbander of armies."

MACARIA. Daughter of Heracles

MACISTUS. An unknown mountain in Euboea

MAENADS. A name given to the frenzied worshippers of Dionysus.

MAENALUS. A mountain in Arcadia.

MAEOTIS. The Sea of Azov. The Amazons lived in this area.

MAGNES. An early comic poet; flourished around 460, died shortly before 424.

MAGNESIA. District in Thessaly.

MAIA. The mother of Hermes.

MALEA. A promontory of southeastern Laconia.

MALIS. A district in southern Thessaly.

MANES. A common slave-name.

MANIA. Feminine form of Manes.

MARATHON. A village in a plain on the east shore of Attica, site of the Athenian defeat of the Persians in 490.

MARILADES. Name of an Acharnian, derived from *marile*, "charcoal-embers."

MARON. A priest of Apollo whom Odysseus spared when he took the city of Ismarus.

MARPSIAS. A contentious orator

MEDEA. A Colchian princess, who, after aiding the Argonauts, returned with Jason to Greece as his wife

MEDES. Really a separate Iranian people, they were regularly confused with the Persians by the Greeks.

MEDUSA. One of the Gorgons.

MEGABAZUS. A Persian name. No such person ever sat on the throne of Persia, but the appellation was a familiar one and it would further suggest to the Greek the words in his own tongue *mega bazon*, "talking big."

MEGACLES. A name frequently borne by the Alcmeonidae.

MEGARA. 1. A Greek state west of Attica and south of Boeotia, ruined by Pericles' boycott. Comedy was reputed to have originated thence. 2. The name of a wife of Heracles, the daughter of Creon, king of Thebes.

MEGAREUS. See Sophocles, *Antigone*, note 3.

MELANION. The hero who won the footrace with Atalanta; he is not usually called a woman-hater

MELANIPPE. A mythological heroine who was seduced by Aeolus.

MELANTHIUS. A tragic poet, brother of Morsimus. His dramas seem to have been almost as unpleasant as his per-

sonality; a glutton and a leper, he was noted for his flattery and his pederasty, and his voice is reputed to have been exceptionally harsh.

MELETUS A writer of drinking-songs and bad tragedies, but much better known as one of the accusers of Socrates.

MELOS. An island in the Aegean, birthplace of Diagoras the atheist

MEMNON. A son of Zeus, slain by Achilles.

MEMPHIS. A famous city in Egypt.

MENELAUS. King of Sparta, son of Atreus, brother of Agamemnon, husband of Helen, father of Hermione and Megapenthes.

MENIPPUS. An Athenian horse-trader, nicknamed *chelidon,* which means both "tender hollow of a hoof" and "swallow."

MENOECEUS. Father of Jocasta and Creon. See also Sophocles' *Antigone,* note 3.

MERIONES. A Cretan, one of the Greek warriors at Troy.

MEROPE. Wife of the Corinthian king, Polybus. The foster-mother of Oedipus.

MESSAPIUS. A mountain in Boeotia, near Euboea.

MESSENIA. The southwestern section of the Peloponnesus, subject to Sparta in historical times, but so oppressed that revolts were not unknown The incident referred to in *Lysistrata* (1141) took place in 464.

METON. A great mathematician, astronomer, and calendar reformer, he seems to have been interested in town-planning also.

MICON. An Athenian fresco-painter

MIDAS. A slave-name, like the Phryx and Masyntias which follow it

MIDIAS. An Athenian who bred quails

MILESIANS. The inhabitants of Miletus, a Greek city on the coast of Asia Minor. After the Persian Wars they became subjects of Athens It would appear that the demagogue Cleon had attempted to have their tribute raised The proverb that they had once been brave is reported to have originated as an oracular response to Polycrates, the sixth-century tyrant of Samos, when he was considering making them his allies. The city was famous for its gay life and easy morals, and the artificial penises there manufactured were considered superior to any others. Miletus revolted from Athens in 412.

MILTIADES. Athenian hero at the battle of Marathon in 490. He was credited with the victory, but this is probably unjust to Callimachus, the polemarch.

MIMAS. One of the giants who fought against the gods.

MINOS. King of Crete, husband of Pasiphae, and father of Phaedra and Ariadne.

MINOTAUR A Cretan monster, half man and half bull, born of a union between Pasiphae and a bull The Minotaur, to whom the Athenians had to make annual human sacrifice, was finally slain by Theseus.

MINYAE. An ancient Greek race, originally located in Thessaly.

MITYLENE. (Also spelled Mytilene) The chief city on the island of Lesbos. In 428 Mitylene, followed by all the other towns on the island except Methymna, had revolted. After the revolt had been suppressed and Lesbos recovered in the following year, a debate was held at Athens as to suitable punishment. Led on by Cleon's oratory the Assembly voted a wholesale massacre, but rescinded the decree the next day. A ship was sent out to overtake the previous one bearing the fateful command, and an exciting race across the Aegean was narrowly won by the pursuers The bribe which Cleon is accused of having taken from the Mitylenaeans must have been connected with some later incident.

MNEMOSYNE. Goddess of memory and mother of the Muses.

MNESILOCHUS It is by no means certain that he actually was the father-in-law of Euripides, but this term is more convenient to the translator than any vaguer one such as "kinsman."

MOIRAI. The Fates, the Roman Parcae

MOLON. An otherwise unknown man, reported to have been of gigantic stature.

MOLOSSI A people who inhabited Epirus

MORSIMUS. A writer of very bad tragedies, brother of Melanthius.

MORYCHUS. An Athenian dandy and gourmet.

MOSCHUS. A bad lyre-player.

MOTHON A crude kind of dance, of which sailors are reported to have been fond

MUSAEUS. A very ancient poet of Thrace

MYCENAE. An ancient city in Argolis, Agamemnon's kingdom.

MYCONUS. An island in the Aegean

MYRMIDONS The people of whom Achilles was the leader.

MYRONIDES. A successful Athenian general in the period immediately after the Persian Wars.

MYRTILUS The treacherous charioteer of Oenomaus, who betrayed his master and was killed by Pelops

MYSIA A district in northwestern Asia Minor

MYSTAE. Initiates into the Mysteries

MYSTERIES. Symbolic rituals in honour of various gods, witnessed only by initiates The formulae were supposed to be secret. The most famous of the Mysteries were those of Demeter, Persephone, and Iacchus at Eleusis in Attica.

NAUPACTUS. A town on the northern shore of the Gulf of Corinth

NAUPHANTE. Name of a trireme, formed from *naus*, "ship," as is Nauson, the name of her mother.

NAUPLIA. A town on the coast of Argolis, near the city of Argos.

NAUPLIUS King of Euboea, and father of Palamedes Odysseus foully slew Palamedes, hence to gain revenge Nauplius lighted a false beacon on Euboea and lured the Greek fleet to destruction as it sailed home from Troy

NAUSICYDES A grain-profiteer

NAXOS An island in the Aegean, laid waste by the Persians in 490, conquered by Cimon in 471.

NELEUS. Father of Nestor, and grandfather of Antilochus.

NEMEA. A valley in Argolis where Heracles slew the Nemean lion

NEMESIS A Greek goddess, who punished those guilty of *hybris*, "overweening pride"

NEOCLIDES An orator afflicted with ophthalmia.

NEOPTOLEMUS The son of Achilles

NEPHELOCOCCYGIA. The name finally chosen for the city of the birds in Aristophanes' comedy of that name. Formed from *nephele*, "cloud" and *kokkyx*, "cuckoo," it has been variously rendered with various success The German *Wolkenkukelheim* and the French *Coucou-les-Nuées* are both good, but the English efforts have been less felicitous; we here suggest "Cuckoo-on-Cloud"

NEREUS. A sea god, father of the Nereids.

NESSUS. See the Introduction to Sophocles' *The Trachiniae*.

NESTOR. King of Pylos, son of Neleus, father of Antilochus, and the oldest and wisest of the Greek chiefs in the Trojan War.

NICIAS. A wealthy aristocrat, leader of the conservative party at Athens He frequently and ineffectively served the state as military commander, and he was in charge of the Sicilian expedition after the recall of Alcibiades and the death of Lamachus After the debacle he was executed by the Syracusans. Superstitious and pusillanimous, he was the worst sort of person to command an army, and it is regrettable that the lives of so many others should have depended on the judgment of such an individual The effeminate of the same name mentioned in *The Ecclesiazusae* (428) was probably his grandson.

NICODICE A woman's name, formed from *nike*, "victory" and *dike*, "justice."

NICOMACHUS A corrupt under-secretary in the public service.

NICOSTRATUS. A man who was inordi-

nately fond of sacrifices and of foreigners.

NIOBE. Daughter of Tantalus, wife of Amphion of Thebes, mother of fourteen children, because of which she thought herself superior to Leto All her offspring were slain by Apollo and Artemis and Niobe herself was turned by Zeus into a stone on Mt. Sipylus in Lydia, which shed tears in the summer.

NISUS King of Megara, and father of Scylla.

NOMAN When Odysseus was asked by the Cyclops to give his name, he answered "Noman" After the monster's eye had been burned out and he had called on his fellow Cyclopes for assistance, they asked who was harming him and he said "Noman" They naturally left him to his fate, and Odysseus made good his escape.

NOTUS The South Wind.

NYSA. The legendary scene of the nurture of Dionysus. There are several places which are given this name

OCEANUS. The god of the water which was believed to surround the whole earth He was the husband of Tethys

ODEON The name of one of the buildings in which trials were held; it had formerly been used for musical contests.

ODYSSEUS King of Ithaca, son of Laertes, husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus Famous for his craftiness and adroitness, he is usually the villain of the tragic plots in which he appears

OEA An unidentified crag in Attica

OEAGRUS A popular actor

OFAX Brother of Palamedes

OECHALIA A town in Euboea.

OECLEUS Father of Amphiaraus.

OEDIPUS King of Thebes, son of Laius and Jocasta, father of Eteocles, Polyneices, Antigone, and Ismene It was his sad fate unwittingly to kill his father and to marry his mother

OENEUS. King of Pleuron and Calydon in Aetolia, father of Tydeus, Meleager, Althaea, and Deianeira.

OENIADAE A town in Acarnania, a district near Aetolia

OENOE A town in the central Peloponnesus.

OENOMAUS. King of Pisa in Elis. Pelops contested with him in a famous chariot race.

OETA. A mountain in southern Thessaly on which Heracles' funeral pyre was placed.

OLOPHYXIANS. The inhabitants of Olophyxus, a small town on the Chalcidian peninsula of Acte. The only point of their introduction is to build up to the pun in the name Ototyxians, from *ototyzein*, "to wail"

OLYMPIA A place in Elis, in the Peloponnesus, where the Olympic games were celebrated every four years; citizens of every state in Greece took part A famous temple of Zeus was located there

OLYMPUS A mountain between Macedonia and Thessaly In Greek mythology it is regarded as the home of the gods

OMPHALE A Lydian queen under whom Heracles served in bondage

ONESIMUS. "Profitable"

OPORA Goddess of the harvest.

OPUNTIAN LOCRIS A state in central Greece, north of Phocis An inhabitant of this state was called *Opountios*, which was also the name of an informer who had only one eye

ORESTES. 1. Son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, brother of Electra. 2. The name of a notorious brigand

OREUS. A town in Euboea.

ORION. In mythology a hunter. After his death he was placed as a constellation among the stars

ORNEAE. A town in the Argolid, the scene of some Athenian military operations in 415 The name of the town suggests the Greek word *ornis*, "bird"

ORPHEUS A mythical character, regarded as a great poet. A mystery religion developed out of the stories of his life and death.

ORTHIAN MODE. This was one of the most high-pitched of the many modes in Greek music.

ORTYGIA. An ancient name of Delos.

OSSA. A mountain in Thessaly.

PACTOLUS. A river in Lydia, whose golden sands became proverbial.

PAIAN. Originally an independent god of healing. Later this divinity was fused into that of Apollo, and Paean became simply another name for him It was then transferred to designate a hymn of thanksgiving addressed to Apollo Aristophanes uses it in both senses, and occasionally with a pun on the Greek word *paiein*, "to strike"

PAEON. The fictitious name of the father of Cinesias. The Greek *paion* means "striking," but has a secondary sense of "making love to."

PAEONIA. A district in Macedonia.

PALAEMON. A sea god. See INO.

PALAMIDES See NAUPLIUS.

PALLAS. Athene.

PALLENE. Probably an Attic deme between Athens and Marathon.

PAMPHILA. "Dear to all"

PAMPHILUS. A demagogue, caught embezzling state funds and deprived of his property. The needle-seller's name was Aristoxenus, and he was hand in glove with Pamphilus, sharing the profits of his peculations and the sorrows of his indigence (*Plutus* 174f) In *Plutus* 385 we find a reference to the painting of the Heracleidae by another Pamphilus.

PAMPHYLIA. A district in Asia Minor between Lycia and Cilicia.

PAN. An originally Arcadian god of flocks and shepherds. Sudden terror (panic) was caused by him

PANATHENAEA. A festival of Athene, celebrated in Athens every five years It was accompanied by feasting and a number of ceremonial performances, choral poetry, dancing, etc.

PANCRATIUM. A kind of fighting event in Greek games in which both boxing and wrestling were allowed.

PANDELETUS. A notorious informer.

PANDION. King of Athens and father of Aegeus.

PANDORA. In Greek mythology, the first woman on earth and the cause of numberless evils to mankind In *The Birds* her name is mentioned because of its meaning, "giver of all."

PANDROSOS. Daughter of Cecrops and first priestess of Athene.

PANGAEUS. A mountain in Macedonia.

PANTHOOS. Father of the Trojan heroes, Euphorbus and Polydamas.

PANURGIPPARCHIDES. "Rogue-Hipparch."

PAPHLAGONIA. A country in northern Asia Minor; its inhabitants were coarse and backward. The Greeks knew them only as slaves.

PAPHOS A town on the west coast of Cyprus, celebrated as the chief centre of Aphrodite's worship.

PARALUS. Name of one of the two especially swift galleys which were reserved for the delivery of official messages, the serving of summonses, the recall of persons to trial, etc. The other one was called Salaminia.

PARIS. Son of Hecuba and Priam, who carried off Helen, the wife of Menelaus Aphrodite promised Helen to him, if he gave her the award for beauty in her contest with Hera and Athene.

PARNASSUS. A mountain near Delphi, the haunt of Apollo and the Muses.

PARNES. A well-wooded mountain in Attica.

PAROS An island in the Aegean Sea.

PARRHASIA. A range of mountains in Arcadia.

PARTHENICA. Choral lyric poems designed to be sung by groups of virgins

PARTHENOPAEUS Son of Atalanta, one of the seven champions who attacked Thebes.

PASIPHAE. See MINOS and MINOTAUR.

PATROCLIDES. An Athenian who had the misfortune to defecate while sitting in the theatre.

PATROCLUS. A Greek hero in the Trojan War. He was Achilles' closest friend and was slain by Hector.

PAUSON. A painter who was also a scoundrel.

PEGASUS. See BELLEROPHON

PEIRITHOUS. King of the Lapithae in Thessaly. He became a warm friend of Theseus.

PELARGICON. The wall around the plateau of the Acropolis at Athens.

PELASGUS. A mythical king of Argos Sometimes the Greeks as a whole are called Pelasgians because of a tradition which said that a Pelasgus, not the Argive king, was the ancestor of the earliest inhabitants of Greece.

PELEIADES. The priestesses who interpret the oracle at Dodona.

PELEUS. Son of Aeacus and King of Phthia. Husband of Thetis and father of Achilles.

PELIAS. King of Iolcus, father of Alcestis and Acastus. He sent Jason on the quest for the Golden Fleece. On Jason's return, Medea deceitfully persuaded Pelias' daughters that they could restore their father's youth by cutting him to pieces and boiling him

PELION. A mountain in Thessaly.

PELLENE. A city in Achaea, allied with Sparta. Heavy cloaks were made there.

PELOPS. He came to Greece as an exile from Phrygia. He married Hippodamia, daughter of Oenomaus, and was the ancestor of the house of Atreus, whose members are called Pelopidae. The Peloponnesus takes its name from him.

PENEUS. The chief river in Thessaly

PENTHEUS. King of Thebes, son of Agave and grandson of Cadmus.

PEPLUS. A woman's outer garment in the form of a large rectangular piece of cloth, usually richly embroidered or at least decorated around its borders, and worn thrown around the shoulders and gathered up with the arms so that it fell in heavy folds; for ordinary uses the peplus was fairly short, but there were very long and impractical ones for display purposes In Aristophanes the word (in the present translation) always signifies the Sacred Peplus, a huge piece of cloth woven by the maidens of Athens, embroidered with pictures of mythological events in which Athene took part, and presented to that goddess at the Panathenaea.

PERGASAE A rural Attic deme.

PERICLES. The leading Athenian statesman in the period after the Persian Wars. He had been a prominent member of the democratic faction as early as 469, and the ostracism of the conservative Cimon in 461 brought this group to power; the murder of Ephialtes shortly thereafter left Pericles in a position of undisputed control From then until his death in 429 he was, with one exception, annually reelected General, and he ruled Athens almost as a tyrant but quite within the constitutional framework of the democracy. His policy was aggressive and imperialistic, in contrast to the pro-Spartan line of his conservative predecessors, and he recognized that this made a war sooner or later inevitable. In 432 it was obvious that the outbreak of hostilities was imminent and Pericles struck the first blow with the famous Megarian Decree. This is the butt of several of Aristophanes' gibes, as are the great power which the statesman wielded and the alliance which he had contracted with Aspasia. The reference in *The Clouds* (859) is to a remark which Pericles made in the course of the annual examination which all Athenian magistrates had to undergo at the close of their terms and in which they had to render an account of their conduct of office Any expenditures of public funds naturally had to be explained on such occasions, and on one of them Pericles accounted for a rather large sum only by saying that he had spent it "for what was necessary" The vagueness of this answer aroused Spartan suspicions, and dissatisfaction with the manner in which their kings were conducting the war in Attica suggested that what Pericles had really done

was to bribe the monarchs to withhold their attacks. These unfortunates were forthwith recalled; one of them was exiled and the other fined for treachery.

PERRHAEBIA A district in Thessaly

PERSEPHASSA. Persephone.

PERSEPHONE. The daughter of Zeus and Demeter, who became the wife of Hades and the queen of the Underworld.

PERSEUS. A mythical hero, son of Zeus and Danae. He was the slayer of Medusa.

PHAFAX. A politician of some importance and an orator of great plausibility in Athens in the early years of the Peloponnesian War.

PHAEDRA Daughter of Minos and wife of Theseus.

PHAETHON Son of Helios, who was allowed to drive the chariot of the Sun The youth could not control the horses, and was killed by Zeus to prevent the earth from catching fire.

PHALERUM. A port near the Piraeus; Phaleric anchovies were a favourite Athenian delicacy.

PHALES. The god of the phallus

PHALLUS. The male sexual organ in a state of tumescence. Festivals of Dionysus, in which rites of fertility played a large part, always included a phallic procession in which was carried a huge figure of this symbol of fruitfulness and generation.

PHANAE. A town on the island of Chios, mentioned in *The Birds* (1694) with a pun on the word *phainein,* "to inform against."

PHANOTEUS. A Phocian ally of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

PHARNACES. A Persian satrap.

PHAROS. An island off the coast of Egypt

PHARSALUS. A town in Thessaly

PHASIS. A river in Colchis, flowing into the east end of the Euxine. In *Acharnians* (726) there is a pun on *phainein,* "to inform against"

PHAYLLUS. A celebrated runner

PHELLEUS. A mountain in Attica.

PHERAE. An ancient town in Thessaly.

PHERECRATES. A successful comic poet.

PHERES. Father of Admetus.

PHIDIAS A great Greek sculptor, friend of Pericles, attacked by the enemies of that statesman.

PHILIPPUS. 1. The father of Aristophanes. 2. An orator.

PHILISTA. "Dearest"

PHILOCLEON. "Lover of Cleon"

PHILOCLES. A bad tragic poet, father of Morsimus and Melanthius. The point of the jibe in *Birds* (281ff) is as follows: Sophocles had written a play called *Tereus;* Philocles had written one with the same title and had plagiarized Sophocles liberally; Epops considers himself the Tereus of Sophocles and is thus the father of Philocles and the grandfather of the sad bird who has just entered and is also named Epops, following the Greek practice of naming children after their grandfathers.

PHILOCTETES. Son of Poeas, a great archer, dear friend of Heracles, whose pyre he lighted.

PHILOMEL. Daughter of Pandion and sister of Procne.

PHILONIDES The man who maintained the courtesan Laïs.

PHILOSTRATUS. See CYNALOPEX.

PHILOXENUS. "Fond of aliens," the name of a notorious pederast.

PHINEUS. King of Salmydessus in Thrace. He blinded his sons because of a false accusation by their stepmother against them. The gods then blinded him and sent the Harpies to torment him He was delivered from these monsters by two of the Argonauts.

PHLEGRA. Battleground of gods and Titans

PHLYA. An Attic deme.

PHOCIS A country in northern Greece in which the Delphic oracle was situated.

PHOCUS. A half-brother of Peleus and Telamon, who slew him out of jealousy.

PHOEBE. Another name for Artemis Also a sister of Clytemnestra.

PHOENICIA. A country on the extreme eastern shore of the Mediterranean.

PHOENIX. The old guardian of Achilles

PHOLOE. A mountain in Arcadia where Heracles fought the Centaurs.

PHORCYS. A sea deity, father of the Graeae and the Gorgons.

PHORMIO. A successful Athenian admiral in the early years of the Peloponnesian War, something of a martinet and of austere and frugal personal habits His hirsuteness was notorious

PHORMISIUS. A very hairy man who was rather important politically in the years following the Sicilian expedition.

PHRATRY. A subdivision of a tribe, in the survivals of the old tribal organization of Attica Enrollment in a phratry was the token of legitimacy.

PHRYGIAN. Trojan; Phrygia was a country in northwestern Asia Minor.

PHRYNICHUS 1. A tragic dramatist, the most important before Aeschylus, noted for the preponderance of lyric and dancing in his plays 2 The name of a comic poet, a contemporary and rival of Aristophanes 3. The name of a prominent member of the oligarchical revolutionary group in 411

PHRYNIS. A composer of "modernistic" music for the lyre, and a talented performer on that instrument.

PHRYX. "Phrygian," a slave-name.

PHTHIA. A district in southeastern Thessaly, the realm of Achilles

PHYLARCH. The commander of a division of cavalry. Each of the ten tribes contributed 100 horsemen, and a member of the knightly class was chosen from each tribe to be phylarch (tribe-commander) of his tribe's contingent

PHYLE. An Attic deme on the Boeotian border In 404 Thrasybulus, at the head of an army of exiled democrats, captured Phyle and thus provided the entering wedge for the expulsion of the Thirty. After the restoration of the democracy in 403 an almost complete amnesty was declared.

PIERIA A district on the southeast coast of Macedonia, an early haunt of the Muses

PINDUS. A mountain between Thessaly and Epirus.

PIRAEUS. The port of Athens. Themistocles had brought about the construction of the Long Walls connecting it with the metropolis and making it, in a very real sense, part thereof.

PIRENE. A famous fountain at Corinth, where Bellerophon caught Pegasus.

PISA. A district in Elis in the Peloponnesus.

PISANDER. An oligarch who loved to wear splendid uniforms, but was really a coward In 411 he was one of the leaders of the reactionary revolution.

PITHETAERUS. "Persuader of friends."

PITTALUS. A noted physician at Athens.

PITTHEUS. King of Troezen, the son of Pelops, father of Aethra, and grandfather of Theseus.

PLATAEA A Boeotian town near the Attic border. The sympathies of the inhabitants had always been with Athens, and they aided the Athenians at Marathon. In 479 the final defeat of the Persians on land took place near Plataea, and her territory was proclaimed inviolable thereafter.

PLATHANE. "Bread-pan."

PLEIADES. A constellation.

PLEISTHENES. One tradition makes him the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus.

PLEISTUS A river in Phocis.

PLEURON. An ancient city in Aetolia

PLUTO The supreme god of the Underworld.

PLUTUS The god of wealth

PNYX. The place where sessions of the Athenian popular assembly were held

POEAS. The father of Philoctetes

POLEMARCH Originally the supreme commander of the Athenian military, one of the nine archons, in Aristophanes' time merely a judicial official whose special province was the supervision of suits involving foreigners.

POLEMON. "Belligerent."

POLIAS OR POLIEUS. "Guardian of Cities."

POLYBUS. King of Corinth, the foster-father of Oedipus.

POLYDEUCES. An alternate name for Pollux. See DIOSCURI.

POLYDORUS. 1. Father of Labdacus. 2 Son of Hecuba and Priam.

POLYMESTOR. A Thracian king, a treacherous ally of Priam.

POLYNEICES. Son of Oedipus and Jocasta. His name means literally "much-wrangling."

POLYPHEMUS. One of the Cyclopes.

POLYXENA. Daughter of Priam and Hecuba, who was sacrificed to appease the shade of Achilles.

PONTUS. The Black Sea.

PORPHYRION. 1. One of the Titans. 2. The name of a bird, probably a kind of coot.

POSEIDON. God of the sea; also the causer of earthquakes. He was a brother of Zeus and the father of Cyclopes Horse-racing was under his patronage.

POTIDAEA. A town on the Chalcidian peninsula of Pallene, subject to Athens.

POTNIAE. A place in Boeotia.

PRAMNIUM. A mountain on the island of Icaria, west of Samos.

PRASIAE. A town in Laconia

PRAXAGORA. "Active in the marketplace."

PREPIS. A notorious Athenian homosexual.

PRIAM. King of Troy during the Trojan War.

PRIAPUS. A god of fertility, usually represented with erected penis

PRINIDES. The name of an Acharnian; it is formed from *prinos,* "ilex," the wood of which seems to have been used to make charcoal.

PROCNE. A daughter of Pandion, who slew her son Itys in order to avenge herself on Tereus, her husband, who had sought to put her out of the way and to marry Philomela, her sister Procne was changed into a nightingale, Tereus into a hoopoe

PROCRUSTES. A famous brigand of mythology, who forced people to lie in beds which did not fit them; those who were too large had their limbs sawed off, while those who were too small were stretched on the rack. The name is derived from the word *prokrouein,* which means both "to stretch" and "to lay a woman before someone else."

PRODICUS. A sophist, famous for the breadth of his knowledge, contemporary with Socrates.

PROMETHEUS. One of the Titans, a great benefactor of mankind. He stole fire from heaven and brought it to earth, thereafter teaching men all the useful arts Zeus punished him by chaining him to a rock in the Caucasus and sending an eagle to eat his liver. He was finally freed by Heracles.

PRONOMUS. A flute-player who had grown an immense beard.

PROPONTIS. The Sea of Marmora

PROTESILAUS. The first Greek to be slain in the war at Troy.

PROTEUS. A mythical king of Egypt.

PROXENI. Citizens of Greek states appointed, because of family connections or other ties, to be representatives and protectors of the citizens of some other state who were temporarily or permanently residing in the native state of the Proxenus. Thus some Spartan might be chosen Proxenus of Athens at Sparta, and his duty would be to take care of any Athenians there resident. The position of the Proxeni is closely paralleled in those consuls in modern times who are chosen from out of the citizen body of the state in which they serve and are not citizens of the state which they represent.

PROXENIDES. A famous boaster.

PRYTANES. The Athenian Council of 500 did not customarily operate as a whole, but in tenths, each group of fifty representatives of a single tribe having control of affairs for one tenth of the fiscal year of 360 days. These fifty Councillors, when in power, were called Prytanes.

PRYTANEUM The building in which the

Prytanes conducted their business, ate their meals, and entertained foreign ambassadors.

PSACAS. "Sputterer."

PSEUDARTABAS. "Fake Artabas." Many Persian names contained the form Arta-.

PYANEPSIA A festival of Apollo

PYLADES. The devoted friend of Orestes His father was Strophius, King of Phocis

PYLOS. The name of three towns on the west coast of the Peloponnesus, it is uncertain which was the home of Nestor. One was on the Bay of Navarino, and was the site of the Athenian victory under Cleon in 425.

PYRRHANDRUS. A comic name, meaning "yellow man." The reference is to the colour of ordure as usually designated by the Greeks.

PYRRHUS. Alternate name for Neoptolemus.

PYTHIAN. Pertaining to the Delphian Apollo.

RHADAMANTHUS. One of the judges in the Underworld.

RHEA. Wife of Cronus and mother of Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus Later she was identified with Cybele.

RHESUS. A king of Thrace during the Trojan War; an ally of the Trojans

RHIUM. A promontory at the entrance of the Gulf of Corinth

RHODES. A large island in the southeastern Aegean

SAÏAN. Thracian.

SALABACCHO. A famous courtesan.

SALAMINIA. See PARALUS.

SALAMIS. An island off the coasts of Attica and Megara, scene of the decisive defeat of the Persian navy in 480. From the sixth century Salamis had been subject to Athens.

SALMYDESSUS. A town in Thrace on the shores of the Black Sea.

SAMOS. An island off the Ionian coast.

SAMOTHRACE. An island off the coast of Thrace. The mysteries of the Cabiri were celebrated here, but in this case we have to do with genuine mysteries, for no trustworthy information has been preserved regarding them. It would seem that the initiates were popularly credited with the power of making their each wish come true.

SAMPHORAS. A horse with the brand Sampi, an obsolete Greek letter.

SARDANAPALUS. The last king of the Assyrian Empire, famous for his luxurious manner of life.

SARDIS The capital of Lydia, fabulously wealthy.

SARONIC GULF. A bay of the Aegean Sea between Attica and Argolis.

SARPEDON. Son of Zeus, a prince of Lycia, and an ally of the Trojans during the war.

SATYRS. A mythological race of beings, with many goatish characteristics, who formed part of the retinue of Dionysus, and symbolized the animal elements of human nature. On vases they are frequently painted with penis erect, "attacking" nymphs from behind.

SATYRUS. An Athenian homosexual.

SCAMANDER. A famous river in the Troad.

SCAPHEPHORUS. The bearer of an urn containing honey and cakes in religious processions This office was customarily filled by the daughters of the resident aliens.

SCELLIAS. The father of one Aristocrates.

SCIAPODES. A fabulous race of beings thought to inhabit the tropical borders of the Atlantic. They were believed to walk on all fours and to possess enormous feet, which served on occasion as umbrellas, shielding them from the hot rays of the sun.

SCIONE. A town on the Chalcidian isthmus of Pallene, which withstood for two years the siege begun by the Athenians in 423.

SCIRONIAN. Referring to some rocks between Attica and Megaris, where Theseus slew the robber Sciron.

SCIROPHORIA. A festival of Athene in which the women took part.

SCYLLA. A sea monster, living in a cave on the Italian side of the straits between Italy and Sicily.

SCYROS An island off Euboea.

SCYTHIANS. A rude nomadic people dwelling northeast of Thrace; the Athenians employed Scythian archers as policemen.

SEBINUS. An Athenian, whose name suggests *binein*, "to make love to."

SELLI. A prehistoric tribe, dwelling near Dodona.

SELLUS. Father of Aeschines; the name is also given as Sellartius

SEMELE. Daughter of Cadmus and mother of Dionysus

SENATE. The usual, but not too precise, translation of the Greek *boule*. In Athens this body had 500 members chosen by lot, ten from each tribe They held office for one year, and functioned through the rotating committees called Prytanes. The *Boule* had the normal executive, deliberative, and initiative functions of any ancient derivative of the prehistoric and Homeric Council of Elders.

SEPIAN. Referring to a promontory in southeastern Thessaly, not far from Mt. Pelion.

SERIPHUS. A tiny Aegean island

SIBYL. A name given to several inspired prophetesses of the gods.

SICINNIS. A dance of the Satyrs.

SICYON. A town on the Corinthian Gulf, west of Corinth.

SIDON. A city in Phoenicia.

SIGEUM. The northwestern promontory of the Troad, the site of the Greek camp in the Trojan War.

SILENIAE. A part of the shore of Salamis.

SILENUS. A Satyr who is said to have brought up and instructed Dionysus.

SILPHIUM. A plant which grew in Cyrene and adjacent countries; its juice was highly valued as a flavouring element in food and as a medicine. Its effects seem to have been rather like those now popularly ascribed to certain kinds of beans.

SIMOIS. A river in the Troad.

SIMONIDES. One of the finest of the early Greek poets composing choral lyric. He seems to have been the first to write for money, and he thus became the hireling poet *par excellence* in the minds of the ancients.

SINIS. A robber slain by Theseus. See SCIRONIAN.

SIPYLIAN Referring to a mountain in Phrygia

SIRENS. Sea-nymphs, who had the power of charming and luring to destruction all who heard their songs

SIRIUS. The dog star.

SISYPHUS. Son of Aeolus, King of Corinth, and founder of the royal house there. For his wickedness in life he was severely punished in the Underworld. One tradition makes him the father of Odysseus

SITALCES. A king of Thrace, who had built up a very large and powerful empire in the latter half of the fifth century.

SKYTALE A Spartan method of sending messages in cipher The papyrus or other writing material was wound around a staff and then written on lengthwise. Once unwound it was very difficult to read unless one could wind it around a staff of the same size; this, of course, only the recipient of the message was supposed to be able to do.

SMICRINES. "Testy"

SMICYTHES. An Athenian pederast so extremely effeminate that Aristophanes (*Knights* 969) after mentioning his name, adds "and *her* husband" In the Greek this had a clearer point than it can possibly be given in English, for the name is in the accusative case, *Smikythen*, and the case ending *-en* for masculines whose nominative ends in *-es* is also the accusative ending of feminines whose nominative ends in *-e*. Thus *Smikythen* could also be the accusative of the woman's name *Smikythe*.

SOCRATES. The famous philosopher. See the remarks in the Introduction to

The Clouds. To this we may add that we have no evidence of his not having been clean in his habits. He was, on the other hand, very fond of conversation, and no one could be with him for long without getting drawn into a philosophic discussion of some sort.

SOLON. A famous Athenian statesman and law-giver in the sixth century

SOPHRONA. "Wise."

SPARTA. The chief town in Laconia, head of the Peloponnesian Confederacy.

SPERCHEIUS. A river in southern Thessaly.

SPHETTIA. More correctly Sphettus, a deme in Attica. The name suggests the word *sphex*, "wasp."

SPHINX. A monster who proposed a riddle to the Thebans and killed all who could not solve it Oedipus gave her the correct answer, whereupon she slew herself.

STADIA. Greek measures of length, each about 600 feet.

STENIA. A festival which served as a prelude to the Thesmophoria.

STHENELUS. 1. The father of Eurystheus 2. The son of Capaneus and squire of Diomedes. 3. A tragic actor.

STHENOBOEA. The Potiphar's wife of Greek mythology. She fell in love with Bellerophon, and when that chaste hero would have nothing to do with her, she compassed his death by slandering him to her husband.

STILBIDES. A celebrated Athenian diviner.

STRATEGUS. The title, usually translated "General," of ten Athenian officials who were annually elected by popular vote, one from each tribe, and had charge of the military. It was a position in which a man of judgment and eloquence could exercise an enormous influence on the foreign policies of the city; the most remarkable instance is Pericles.

STRATON. An Athenian homosexual of especial effeminacy.

STRATONICE. "Army victory."

STREPSIADES. "Twister."

STROPHIUS. King of Phocis and father of Pylades.

STRUTHIAN. "Sparrovian."

STRYMON. An important river in Macedonia.

STYX. The principal river of the Underworld which the souls of the dead had to cross.

SUNIUM. A promontory, the southern tip of Attica, with a famous temple of Athene.

SUSA. The winter residence of the Persian king.

SYBARIS. A Greek city in southern Italy. In the latter half of the sixth century it had been very wealthy and its inhabitants had acquired a reputation of maximum luxury and voluptuousness. The Sybaritic fable seems to have been much like those of Aesop, but to have dealt with human rather than animal characters.

SYMPLEGADES. In mythology two islands at the entrance of the Black Sea. The Argo was the first ship to sail between them.

SYRA. Female slave-name, meaning "Syrian."

SYRACOSIUS. A strident orator

SYRISCUS. "Little Syrian."

TAENARUS. A town in Laconia near which was an entrance to the Underworld, according to tradition.

TALAOS. Father of Hippomedon.

TALTHYBIUS. The herald of Agamemnon at Troy.

TANTALUS. The father of Pelops. He was a king either of Lydia or Argos or Corinth. For divulging secrets entrusted to him he was punished horribly in the Underworld.

TAPHIANS. People who dwelt in islands in the Ionian Sea. They slew Alcmena's brothers and Amphitryon exacted vengeance from them.

TARTARUS. The Underworld.

TARTESSUS. A town in Spain; the lampreys caught there were a great delicacy in the ancient world. The name,

however, suggests Tartarus and thus has a terrifying sound.

TAURIANS. A people who lived north of the Black Sea. See Introduction to Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris.*

TAUROPOLIA. An Athenian festival in which the women took part.

TAXIARCH. An officer in the Athenian army, in command of a relatively small number of men; we do not know precisely how many.

TAYGETUS. A lofty mountain range to the west of Sparta.

TECMESSA. The concubine of Ajax, son of Telamon.

TEIRESIAS. A blind Theban seer.

TELAMON. Son of Aeacus, brother of Peleus, and father of Ajax. He was one of the Argonauts See Euripides' *The Trojan Women,* note 9.

TELEAS. An Athenian gourmet.

TELEMACHUS. Son of Odysseus and Penelope.

TELEPHUS. A son of Heracles, who became king of Mysia. He attempted to keep the Greek expedition against Troy from landing on the coast of Asia Minor, but Dionysus made him trip over a vine and he was wounded by Achilles. An oracle informed him that the wound could be healed only by the man who had inflicted it and the Greeks were simultaneously informed that Telephus was indispensable to them. Achilles healed the wound and Telephus gave valuable directions for reaching Troy Euripides had made Telephus the hero of a tragedy by that name, and had brought him on the stage in the beggarly disguise in which he effected entrance into the Greek camp

TELEUTAS. A Phrygian king, the father of Tecmessa.

TENOS. An island in the Aegean.

TEREUS. See PROCNE

TETHYS. The wife of Oceanus

TEUCER. Son of Telamon and half-brother of Ajax He was known as the best archer among the Greeks at Troy.

THUMESSUS. A Boeotian town near Thebes.

TEUTHRAS. An ancient king of Mysia.

THALES The earliest Greek philosopher, famous in later times for his practical as well as his scientific wisdom.

THALLOPHORES. Old men who carried olive-shoots in the Panathenaic procession. This office was assigned only to those who were too feeble or too doting to be of any other use.

THAMYRIS. A Thracian bard who had blasphemed the Muses by challenging them to a contest in song, for which act they blinded him.

THANATOS. The god of death.

THASOS. An island in the northern Aegean, famous for its fragrant wine

THEAGENES. A very squalid Athenian.

THEBES. The chief city in Boeotia, allied with Sparta. Also the name of a city in Egypt and of one in Cilicia

THEMIS. A goddess, the personification of law, custom, and equity.

THERMISCYRA. A region near the Sea of Azov, where the Amazons lived

THEMISTOCLES. One of the most distinguished statesmen that Athens produced. To him the city owed the Greek victory at Salamis and her naval supremacy. Likewise it was through his astuteness that the walls were constructed without Spartan hindrance right after the departure of the Persians. He is reported to have ended his life by drinking poison, but the motivation of this action is unknown.

THEOGENES. A great boaster.

THEOGNIS A tragic poet whose pieces exhibited a distressing coldness.

THEOPHANES. A satellite of Cleon.

THEORIA. A divine personification of festivals or spectacles.

THEORUS A satellite of Cleon.

THERAMENES. Leader of the moderately anti-democratic group in Athens after the Sicilian expedition. He strove always to avoid extremes and was thus forced to transfer his allegiance repeatedly This earned him the nickname *kothornos,* "buskin"

THERMODON. A river on whose banks

the Amazons were supposed to have dwelt.

THERMOPYLAE. The pass from Thessaly into southern Greece, it was here that Leonidas and his Spartans made their famous and futile stand A meeting of an Amphictyonic Council was held in the neighbourhood of Thermopylae every year.

THERSITES The ugliest of the Greeks before Troy, who is presented in the *Iliad* as a backbiter.

THESEUS. King of Attica, son of Aegeus and Aethra, father of Hippolytus, Demophoön, Acamas, and Melanippus. He was the most famous and most active of the legendary heroes of Athens.

THESMOPHORIA. A festival of the Thesmophorae, Demeter and Persephone, held by the matrons of Athens each year; the celebrants were called Thesmophoriazusae.

THESMOTHETES. The title of six of the nine archons at Athens; their special functions were in the field of judicial administration.

THESPROTIA A district in Epirus.

THESSALY A large region in northern Greece, noted for its horses and its witchcraft.

THESTOR. The father of Calchas, the Greek seer.

THETIS A sea goddess, the wife of Peleus and mother of Achilles.

THORICUS. A town in Attica.

THRACE An extensive country northeast of Greece, in mythology famous for its prophetic minstrels, in historical times for its warlike inhabitants and rigorous climate

THRASYBULUS The leader of the democratic exiles in the expulsion of The Thirty in 403, and an important figure in Athens' political life right down to his death in 388 On one occasion he had announced that he would speak in opposition to a proposed alliance of Athens with Thebes against Sparta, but had changed his mind at the last moment and let the measure go through. To the disappointed Lacedaemonians he offered the explanation that just as he was about to speak he was seized with an attack of indigestion from eating wild pears

THRATTA. "Thracian"

THUCYDIDES. Son of Milesias, conservative, chief opponent of Pericles down to 443, no relation to the historian of that name.

THURIUM. An Athenian colony in southern Italy, founded in 443.

THYESTES. Brother of Atreus. See Introduction to Aeschylus' *Oresteia.*

THYIAD. A Bacchant.

THYMAETIS An Attic deme on the shore, not far from the Piraeus.

TIMON. A celebrated misanthrope.

TIMOTHEUS. The wealthy son of the Athenian admiral Conon.

TIRYNS. An ancient town in Argolis.

TISAMENOPHAENIPPUS. A comic name, formed from two proper names, Tisamenus and Phaenippus The former was a son of Acestor and secretary to Cleon. The latter is quite unknown.

TITANS. Giants, born of Earth and Heaven, who warred against the gods.

TITHONUS A mythological character who was married to Eos, the dawn. She requested eternal life for him, but neglected to add that this should be also eternal youth, and the wretched man grew ever older but was unable to die

TITHRASIAN From the Attic deme Tithras.

TMOLUS A mountain range in Lydia

TRACHIS. A town in Thessaly

TRAGELAPH. "Goat-stag"

TRIBALLUS. The Triballi were a rude and distant people living north of the Thracians and often at war with them

TRICORYTHUS. A marshy deme near Marathon.

TRIERARCH The title of the wealthy persons in Athens upon whom, once or twice in a lifetime, fell the onerous public duty of underwriting the equipment and manpower of a trireme.

TRIOBOLUS. A three-obol coin, the pay of all public servants in the Athenian democracy. The practice had begun under Pericles.

TRIPTOLEMUS. One of the heroes in the Demeter legends. In return for his kind treatment of her when she was searching for her daughter, the goddess granted to Triptolemus the knowledge of agriculture; this he taught to mankind, thus becoming the originator of civilization.

TRITON. 1. A sea divinity, son of Poseidon and Amphitrite. When he blew his trumpet he calmed the sea. 2. A river and lake in Libya.

TRIVIA. Daughter of Demeter, sometimes called Hecate, and sometimes identified with Persephone.

TROCHILUS. "Wren."

TROEZEN. A town in southeastern Argolis.

TROPHONIUS. Builder of the temple at Delphi.

TRYGAEUS. "Vineman."

TYDEUS. One of the seven champions who attacked Thebes. The father of Diomedes.

TYNDAREUS. King of Sparta, husband of Leda, and the putative or actual father of Castor, Polydeuces, Helen, and Clytemnestra.

TYPHO. A many-headed monster.

TYRE. A city of Phoenicia.

TYRRHENIA. An alternate name for Etruria.

URANUS. Father of Cronus.

VORACIANS. The Greek is *Tragasaia,* from the little town of Tragasae in the Troad, but with a pun on the word *tragein,* "to devour."

XANTHIAS. A frequent slave-name, from Xanthus, a river in Lydia.

XENOCLES. See CARCINUS

XENOPHANTES. Father of Hieronymus

XUTHUS. See Euripides' *Ion.*

ZACYNTHUS. An island off the northwest corner of the Peloponnesus; part of the Athenian Empire at the time of the Peloponnesian War.

ZETHUS. A Theban, the brother of Amphion.

ZEUXIS. A great painter.